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# IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY



**CRY CHAOS!** By DWIGHT V. SWAIN

SEPTEMBER 1951

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

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# Introducing the AUTHOR



• Photo by JOHN NESOM

**S**CIFANTASY and I have been crossing paths for quite a while now.

It began back around 1927, when I was 12. I came out of a wreck with my head a bit battered . . . and (my family insists) demanding a copy of Hugo Gernsback's old *Amazing Stories Quarterly*.

Jackson, Mich., was my home town. *Wonder Stories* contributed my first rejection slip even before I finished high school, deflating me properly with a cold accusation that my science was "illogical" and incorrect."

But I kept on writing. On the side, I completed my schooling (B.A., University of Michigan, 1937) . . . weeded onions and blocked sugar beets . . . shipped on the Great Lakes . . . peddled gadgets door-to-door and as a pitchman . . . dealt blackjack in Philadelphia . . . hustled packingcases in San Francisco . . .

press-agented for a mind reader . . . interviewed murderers for the true crime books . . . served as secretary of the Erie (Pa.) Industrial Union Council . . . became editorial assistant for a leading aviation magazine without ever having been up in an airplane . . . worked on newspapers from New York to California and back again—

Then, about ten years ago, Ray Palmer bought one of my yarns -- and another, and another, and another, until lo and behold, I discovered that I was actually making a living writing fiction, and wasn't the world a wonderful place!

Shortly thereafter, while free-lancing in Chicago, I met a young woman name of Margaret Simpson who acknowledged our introduction with a horrified, "Oh, no! Not you—!"

It developed that her current boyfriend's idea of a large evening was

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Front cover painting by Walter H. Hinton, illustrating CRY CHAOS! Interiors by: Robert Fuqua, W. E. Terry, Wm. Marsh, Hannes Bok, Herb Ruud, and Ramon Raymond.

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# The Editorial

WE'RE happy to report that the changes in cover design we inaugurated with the June issue have met with your general approval. One or two readers wrote in protesting that they nearly missed finding the issue because they were so used to the former title layout that they passed right by the new, easier-to-read logo! Which, it would seem, in those particular cases nearly defeated the purpose of the change. We received one very flattering critical comment, to wit: "I definitely do not like the change in cover design. Making the magazine easier to find on the stands is no good reason, either. After all, Madge is worth hunting for!"

SPEAKING of covers, the first thing that caught your eye this issue was undoubtedly the Walter Hinton interplanetary painting. It's a beauty, isn't it? Walter took great pains to make it as astronomically accurate in detail as possible. He may have stretched a point here or there for purposes of dramatic composition but by and large it is, we think, one of the finest interplanetaries we've seen.

WHICH brings us to an interesting bit of news on next issue's cover. You will remember the fine photographic presentation Malcolm

Smith did on the April issue. We ran it as a sort of test and we're very happy with the many letters of enthusiastic approval. So we asked Malcolm if he'd like to do another photo-cover soon. He said he would, and the sooner the better.

WE had a novel that was perfect for such a cover, Geoff St. Reynard's **BEWARE, THE USURPERS!** At this writing Malcolm has already shot the various poses of a charming model (we've always contended that the artists have the most fun in this business!) and the finished dyed-print is nearing completion. The scene itself is a symbolic one, and the technique abstract. It's a striking combination that we're sure you'll like.

WEVE made a few changes in department headings this issue, too. They are in line with many of the suggestions you have made in your letters. They are just a few of the many improvements we will make as time goes on.

AND in the line with future trends, we've hinted recently that IMAGINATION will have some big news on stepping up publication frequency. That hint is just about ready to become an established fact. As soon as the various production sched-

ules are ironed out we'll make the formal announcement. And that will be sooner than you think!

**W**E'D like to jump the gun on one phase of bringing IMAGINATION out more often. That concerns the question of using serials. Many of you have evinced a great distaste for serials in your letters. Of course, as long as IMAGINATION was on a bi-monthly basis this posed no problem since we wouldn't use a serial with each section spaced two months apart. But as we step up publication the question will arise. So we'd like to broach the subject now. Do you want serials in IMAGINATION? Take a few minutes right now and drop us a line—a postcard will do.

JUST a word or two about this issue. We think there's a good deal of variety in the stories, as has been our policy. If you like fast action and high adventure you'll enjoy CRY CHAOS! Many of you have asked for this type of story. Ok, here it is. For fantasy we have Emil Petaja and Bill Gault. Then, Kris Neville presents a wonderful mood story with some food-for-thought for good measure. And a real oddity is slick magazine writer, Jules Archer's short story. Believe it or not, this yarn came in with seventeen rejection slips attached to it from "Collier's" on down. And along with the rejection slips the author penned us a note to the effect: "This manuscript has become a chain story. Please don't break it."

**W**E'VE seen a lot of ways to submit a story, but that one topped them all. So we sat down and read the story—with quite a critical eye; afterall, you might assume

that a story that had bounced from 17 good markets just lacked something. After we finished reading it we knew what it lacked: plot, characterization, and logic. Any one of those could mean a reject, and Archer had managed to include all three. — But he had accomplished something else which we liked. He had written as neat a piece of nonsense as we've come across in years. You may call it downright silly, and maybe even ridiculous, but it proves a point: facts are facts only as long as you believe them! So we bought the story—with apologies for breaking the chain—and we offer it at face value, for a few laughs.



"Of course I read Science Fiction!"



# CRY CHAOS!

By  
Dwight U. Swain

The dark star held a dread secret that Gar Shane had to discover before our solar system was destroyed. But to go there meant certain death . . .

THEY got the great silver ship's hatches pried open, finally, and dragged Shane out by his heels. They dumped him on his face in the gravel and cinders of the ramp like a pole-axed *huecco*.

He wasn't a particularly big man, as men came out here in the space-ways. But there was a spare, hard quality to his close-knit body, and the old scars that marked him told of forgotten battles, bitter fights to the death with no quarter asked or given. Strange suns had burnt him dark as a *Malya*. Mercury's blazing sands, the high deserts of Mars, had dulled the crisp brown of his hair. Faint bluish pockmarks along his left cheek bespoke Pluto and the icerthings that dwelt there.

And the *Chonya* belt still girded his waist; the great iron belt of the asteroids, one link for every chief who'd vowed fealty, eternal symbol of his power as *gar*.

So he lay there in the dirt of the ramp like a dog, while the motley rabble that were his captors gathered round. And because he was the man he was; because of the stories and scars; above all, because of that great



iron belt of brotherhood he wore, the token of his might, they hung back just a little, still touched by awe of this fallen great one.

Only then Shane's eyes opened—eyes of that strange, pale blue found only among Earthmen; blank now, unseeing. His fingers scrabbled the dirt. Saliva drooled from the loose mouth and puddled beneath his cheek.

Explosively, a hard-faced Venusian *Pervod* laughed. "I claim the belt!" he cried, and sprang forward, reptilian claws gouging Shane's flesh, rolling the Earthman over.

An incoherent, protestful sound rose in Shane's throat. His mouth worked, and his hands batted clumsily at the *Pervod's* claws.

The Venusian's laugh rang out again—harsh, contemptuous. Skillfully, he fended Shane's blows with bony vestigial wings. His claws worked at the boss that clasped the belt.

Shane's blue eyes lost a little of their blankness. The loose mouth drew in a fraction. "No!" he choked. "No!" He clutched at the *Pervod's* wrists; tried to pull them away.

The *Pervod* twisted free. His claws left bloody paths across Shane's palms. Catching the Earthman's shoulders, he lifted him half clear of the ramp, then slammed him down again with stunning force.

Shane lay limp—panting, head lolled to one side.

The *Pervod* unclasped the belt and pulled it free of Shane's body.

**F**EEEBLY, Shane clutched for the Venusian's ankle, and missed. Shaking, sobbing for breath, he struggled to a sitting position, bracing himself with his arms.

The *Pervod* dangled the belt tantalizingly. "Do you want it, Earthman?" he mocked. "Come get it—quick, while you have the chance!"

Veins stood out at Shane's temples. His fingers dug into the dirt. He brought one leg forward—levered up on it, lurched to his feet, stood swaying.

"The belt of the *Chonyas!*" the *Pervod* shrilled gleefully. "Here it is, *starbo!* The belt of a *gar* for the taking!"

He flicked the belt past Shane's face.

The Earthman lunged for it, staggering wildly. Only collision with the hull of the space ship kept him from pitching to the ground again.

"What? You don't want it?" cried the *Pervod*, sidling closer. "I thought you were *gar* of the asteroids, *yanat*—high chief of the *Chonyas!* Why don't you take your belt?"

Again Shane lunged. But this time the Venusian did not dart away. Instead, he ducked beneath the Earthman's outstretched arms and hurled his whole weight into Shane's middle.

Shane catapulted backward under the impact and crashed against a heavy-thewed Uranian.

"Not there, *Gar* Shane! Here! This way!" shrilled the Venusian.

The Uranian gave Shane a mons-

trous shoved toward the *Pervod*.

But the Venusian side-stepped swiftly. Shane lurched past him, into the arms of a ghoulishly grinning Martian.

The Martian, in turn, shoved Shane on, sent him caroming off at yet another angle. From one to another they drove him, bouncing him about the ring they had formed like the huge ball in a game of *ha lao*. And all the time the *Pervod* danced and waved the belt and shrieked sadistic laughter.

And then, just once, he came too close.

Like the flash of a meteor, Shane's hand shot out. He caught one end of the belt and let it bring him up short.

His weight jerked the Venusian off balance. Before the *Pervod* could recover, Shane was upon him.

Claws slashing, the reptilian fought to hold the belt.

Only then, of a sudden, Shane let go of the precious links of iron. Catching the *Pervod's* wrist, turning as he moved, he ducked between arm and body and levered the arm up behind the Venusian's back.

THE brittle reptilian bones snapped with a sound like the crackling of an angry fire. The *Pervod* shrieked in anguish.

The crowd stood frozen in stunned, unbelieving silence.

Shane caught the end of the iron belt and flicked it out in a loop that circled the *Pervod's* scaly throat.

Then, one end in each hand, he whipped it tight.

The Venusian's scream cut off in mid-breath. His legs, his unbroken arm, flailed desperately.

But Shane stayed behind him, out of reach of the murderous claws, drawing the belt ever tighter.

The *Pervod* sagged.

The crowd's paralysis broke. The air rang with shouts. Beings from a dozen far-flung planets rushed forward.

The muscles in Shane's arms and shoulders bulged. Belt-ends still tight in his hands, he spun about, dragging the Venusian with him, elbowing the others out of the way. Faster he turned, and faster . . . faster, till he was whirling like some monstrous gyro-top, the body of the *Pervod* swinging in a giant arc beyond him, clubbing the other raiders down.

They scrambled back as fast as they'd come, the laughter, the mockery, dead within them.

Shane let go one end of the belt. The *Pervod's* body shot out like a stone from a sling, the head half torn from the torso.

Dizzily, the Earthman lurched to the space ship and braced himself against it. Then, very deliberately, he slung the belt about his waist and snapped the clasp. The blue eyes flamed, no longer blank. Knots of muscle stood out at the hinges of his jaws.

"Who dares to try take the iron belt of the asteroids?" he shouted at the rabble ring that hemmed him in.

No one moved. No one spoke.

Shane swept them with cold, contemptuous eyes. "Scum!" he spat. "Scum of the spaceways! Carrion, one and all!"

But he swayed as he said it, and his face showed white beneath the tan.

"Scum . . ." he repeated in a voice gone dead, and pitched forward, unconscious, to the ground.

## CHAPTER II

THE walls and floor and ceiling and door of Shane's windowless cell all had the cold green glitter of pure telonium.

So did the handcuffs and leg-irons that shackled him.

But the bare metal cot hinged to one wall was of steel.

Telonium rated harder than steel, seventeen point seven times harder. Its tensile strength figured nine times greater.

Even so, it took Shane most of the night to tear loose one of the cot's cross-straps, using the locking lug of the leg-irons as combination pry-bar and cutter.

The cross-strap measured about two inches wide by two feet long. It had the weight and striking edge to cave in the skull of a Uranian *dau*.

Shane laid it down beside him on the cot, and waited for someone to open the cell door.

After awhile faint whispering sounds of motion drifted in; then a

clicking noise.

Shane turned so that shadow half hid his face. He twisted his body in a semblance of restless sleep, and closed his eyes to lash-shuttered slits. His fingers caressed the cross-strap mace.

The door opened. The doorway framed a burly, tentacled Thorian guard.

Then the guard stepped aside and a woman came past him, into Shane's cell, carrying a small, cloth-draped tray. Young and straight and slim, she moved with a *tara*'s grace. Her high, firm breasts were bared in the *Malya* fashion, and the dark loveliness of her face was *Malya* also. Glistening blue-black hair hung clear to her waist in softly rippling waves.

Closing the vault-like door behind her, she crossed the cell to Shane's side: paused there for a moment, looking down at him.

Shane lay very still.

"*Gar* of the asteroids, high chief of the *Chonyas*," the woman said softly, almost to herself. Her voice held a note that might have been weariness, or pain. "You've traveled far, Earthman . . . so far, to have it all end here."

SHE moved on, to the stand that flanked Shane's cot, and busied herself at her tray for a moment. Then, straightening, she held a hypodermic injector up to the light. It contained a colorless liquid. Deftly, she set the screw, adjusted the

high-pressure gas ampule that would spray the injection straight into the bloodstream, without breaking the skin.

Shane twisted a fraction further around on the cot. His breathing was careful, measured.

Turning, the woman bent over him. She poised the injector, close to his throat.

Shane's manacled hands shot up. He caught the woman's wrist; twisted sharply before she could jerk away.

She gave a sharp little in-drawn cry of shock and pain and came down hard on her knees, lithe body writhing. The injector fell from her twitching fingers.

Shane's heel smashed it into the floor. Already, he was up and off the cot, forcing the woman down onto it.

He said tightly: "The first scream breaks your arm, *Malyalara*!"

"A *Malya* does not scream, *Sha Shane*!" she answered through clenched teeth.

She tossed her head as she said it, proud even through the pain, and for the first time the right side of her face came into full view.

And along that whole right side, someone had cropped the glistening black hair short, square with the temple, in the ugly, outlawed badge of slavery.

For a long moment Shane did not move. Then, slowly, he drew back a fraction and relaxed his grip on the woman's arm.

Some of the tightness left the love-

ly face. She rose in a single smooth, supple movement. No fear showed in her dark eyes, even now. Rather, they probed boldly—eagerly, almost—as if measuring Shane's metal.

"What do they call you, *Malyalara*?" he asked.

"My name is Talu, *Sha Shane*."

"You wear your hair cropped like a slave's—"

"—Because I am a slave."

"The Federation banned slavery."

**B**ITTERNESS twisted the woman's mouth. The midnight eyes burned with the fierce, blazing anger that had made her people the scourge of the void within the memory of living man. "I tell myself that every day, *Sha Shane*. But it does not free me."

Shane's lips drew thin. "Has it been long?"

"About an Earth year. I was of Hidalgo. First, the slavers sent in *theol*-smugglers. They sought out our leaders—"

"I know," Shane nodded grimly. "*Theol* breaks the will. Not even a *Malya* can fight, with the hunger for it in him." He broke off. "And then, *Malyalara*—?"

"Then the slave ships came. What else?" Again Talu's ripe lips took on the bitter twist. "They came by the score—whole fleets of them, blasting and killing and hunting us down. The Federation had taken our proton batteries and our fighting ships away, and *theol* had broken the men who should have led us. So they stripped

Hidalgo bare: every man, every woman, every child—”

Shane's fingers dug into the slave girl's arms. “But where did they send you?” he demanded fiercely. “Who wants slaves, in a solar system where power is broadcast free to all planets? What use is there for labor?”

“I do not know.”

“My *Chonyas* have been raided, too. But why?” Shane clenched his fists. “Why raid for slaves, when machines can handle any task? Where do they take them? Are they here, in this place?”

Talu shook her head. “No, not here. This is only a ramping-spot — some small moon the slavers have taken over. But I have seen a woman here, a silver woman—Kyrsis, they name her.” A momentary tremor rippled through the *Malyalara*. “She is evil . . . more evil than words can tell. They say that she is the agent for those who buy. But where she comes from, why her people seek slaves—that I do not know.”

“And who serves her? Who is the raider, the *starbo* whose wolf-pack gathers in the slaves?”

“His name is Reggar, Quos Reggar—”

“*Quos Reggar!*” Shane spat the name as if it were an epithet. “Slaver, smuggler, scum!” He twisted violently against his shackles, blue eyes blazing. “I should have known! I drove him out of the asteroids once—”

“ — And he remembers, *Sha* Shane,” Talu said softly. “He re-

members, and he hates you, and he swears the day will come when you shall pray for death. He has gathered up the scum of the spaceways, the dregs of the void—”

“You mean, he captured me only for vengeance?” Shane broke in. “He dragged me here just to kill me—?”

**T**ALU shook her head. “No, *Sha* Shane. There is more than vengeance. He has plans for using you, great plans. But that is all I know.”

“But how did he capture me? How did he bring me here?” A haunted, haggard shadow flickered across Shane's face. He raised his manacled hands and held his head between them. “I was on a mission, an . . . important . . . mission, traveling through space. There was no sign of trouble. And then, all at once, the void went mad. It was a nightmare: I can't remember what happened—” He broke off, shaking his head as if to clear away the fog of memory. Then his hands fell, and his eyes met the girl's once more. “The next thing I knew, I was coming out of it on the ramp, with dirt in my mouth and a *Pervod* at my throat. And I still don't know how I got here.”

“It was a projector, they say. A Paulsini projector, focussed on your ship. They captured your minds with it—yours, and all your crews!”

Shane stared at her incredulously. “A Paulsini that can reach out into space and take over a ship—? You're mad as a *ban*!”

“They say it is the strongest Paul-

sini mind control beam the universe has ever seen, *Sha Shane*," Talu replied. "It was ten Earth years in the building. The power output would send a spaceship beyond the stars."

Shane's eyes narrowed. "The strongest Paulsini beam the universe has ever seen," he repeated slowly. "It tells something, *Malyalara*. No common slaver ever had the brains or time or money to take on the building of such a machine as that." Thoughtfully, he stared down at his fetters. "And what happens, now that I'm here?"

"I do not know."

"You do not know?" Shane studied the woman's face. "Yet you came here, alone, with an injector, and tried to use it on me."

The other's hands moved in a small, helpless gesture. "The guard was to have done it, *Sha Shane*. But I was there when Reggar gave the order. I had heard of you so many times. I wanted to see you . . ."

"What was in the injector?"

The girl shook her head. "I do not know. They do not trust me to know too much."

"They do not trust you?" Shane's eyes probed hers while the seconds ticked by. He flicked the shattered remnants of the crushed injector with his toe. "But they let you come to my cell alone." The faintest of edges crept into his voice. "And they kept you here on this moon with them, Talu, and sent the rest of your people on across the void to slavery."

FOR a long moment Talu stood motionless as some dark statue. Then, all at once, she began to tremble. Her eyes struck sparks. The bare breasts rose and fell too fast.

"Yes, they kept me," she whispered tautly, fiercely. "A woman can often find a place here . . . for a time."

She swayed forward, and in that instant she seemed suddenly all passion, all temptress. Her body brushed Shane's. The warm, half-parted lips invited him. He stood rigid at the very nearness of her.

Then she drew away once more, and her face had the look of graven stone. "I have made it my business to be kept here, *Sha Shane*," she said icily. "My body is good, and *Malya* blood runs hot, and even slavers can lose their caution. So I stay, and earn what trust I can, and do such work as brought me here. For my grandfather was Toran, the last great *Malya* raider chief. He taught me the old way, the *Malya* way—that blood cries out for blood. I live for the day when my chance will come, and I can let my knife drink deep from the heart of the monster, Quos Reggar, who set the slavers on Hilda-

go!"

Grim-faced, Shane studied her. "You say the words, Talu," he clipped, "but will you prove it?"

"Prove it—?"

"The *Chonya* chiefs gave me a belt—the great iron belt of the asteroids, the symbol of my power as *gar*. I swore an oath when I took

it . . . an oath that the *Chonyas'* blood and tears would be my own."

Wordless, the woman watched him, her face a mirror of mixed emotions.

"They have taken my belt away, Talu, these slavers who raid *Malya* and *Chonya* alike. They have locked me here like a berserk *wrong*, and thrown the key away. But my oath still stands. The *Chonyas* made me *gar* because I knew how to fight, and feared no man. So I'll fight here."

The fierce eagerness crept back into Talu's face. Her hands clutched his. "Yes, yes! But what can you do?"

"I'll carve my way, *Myalara!* I'll give them blood for blood and tears for tears, till the asteroids breath free again!" The ring of steel on steel was in Shane's voice. His face was carved with rocky lines. "You told me that a *Malya* does not scream, Talu. But if you *were* to scream, just once, would that slimy Thorian guard outside pay heed?"

She caught her breath. "And . . . if he did—?"

Shane smiled a thin, hard, ruthless smile. "Even in leg-irons I can drag myself to the door." He bent over the cot and pulled free the broken cross-strap; slashed with it so it sighed and whispered through the air. "It sings a song of death, Talu!"

The woman's midnight eyes burned murder-bright. Her voice was a breathless whisper: "Strike hard and straight and fast, *Sha Shane . . .*"

### CHAPTER III

**N**OW!" Shane clipped.

The slave girl screamed — shrilly, piercingly.

Shane poised, the cross-strap mace drawn back and ready.

A dim whisper of running feet echoed from the corridor outside. The lock clicked sharply. The door burst open.

Light-gun already drawn, the Thorian guard lunged into the cell.

Shane swung the steel.

The Thorian's eyes flicked to the Earthman in the same instant. Desperately, he tried to halt his headlong plunge—to throw himself sideways, out of the way.

He moved too late. The steel struck home. The end bit in along one side of the Thorian's bulbous head. It made a moist, explosive sound, like the bursting of a melon hurled onto pavement. Vile, grey-green sludge gushed forth.

The Thorian's great body jerked in a tremendous, threshing spasm. The light-pistol still clutched in one tentacle, needled a wildly-gyrating purple beam close past Shane's shoulder, then cut off again and clattered to the floor. The body went limp; lay still.

Shane dropped to his knees and clawed up the pistol. Twisting, he brought its muzzle close to the hobbling leg-irons. His finger triggered the exciter.

The purple beam lanced forth. The leg-irons' green telonium links

took on a weirdly luminous glow.

Somewhere in the distance, a faint, humming sound arose.

Talu said: "Hurry! That noise—it is the guard-car!" Tension echoed in her voice.

Muscles stood out along Shane's neck. But he still crouched motionless, the light-beam rock-steady in his hand.

The humming sound grew louder.

"Hurry!" Talu whispered again in a tight, choked voice.

The telonium links were twisting, now—writhing, almost, beneath the pistol's ray.

"Ten seconds more!" Shane clipped.

The leg-irons fell apart.

**T**HE Earthman straightened. His lips were drawn to thin lines. "This guard-car — how does it come?"

"It moves up and down a shaft between the floors; then through the corridors. The Thorian must have rung the alarm as he came—"

"Where will it stop? Here, at this door?"

"No. It is set for the guard-post, down the corridor to the left—"

Shane pivoted. Ignoring the manacles that still held his wrists, he stepped swiftly from the cell.

Here, in the corridor, the humming was like that of a swarm of angry bees. Far off to the left, red lights winked in the dimness.

Talu caught her breath. "The guard-car!" she cried.

Shane broke into a run—left down the corridor, straight towards the oncoming lights.

"No! No, *Sha* Shane—!"

"The guard-post—where is it?"

"Just ahead. There, to the left—"

The post proved to be a mere niche in the wall, a sort of oversized sentry-box with cot and chair and table.

"Under the cot!" Shane snapped.

"But they will trap us here—kill us—"

The red lights were growing ever brighter now. The humming had risen to a low-throated roar. Roughly, Shane forced the *Malya* down and under the cot, then crawled in beside her himself.

"They will trap us!" Talu said again, and the tension in her voice vibrated like a taut-drawn wire. Yet, strangely, her tone held no fear, no panic: only a sort of fierce, throbbing exaltation.

"They'll trap us like lambs trap a lion!" Shane slashed back harshly. His blue eyes burned with a reckless fire. "Would you have us play the sheep—stand back there in the cell and be slaughtered? No! We'll meet them here, where they don't expect us. And if we die, some of them will go along."

Talu's full lips parted. Her laugh came, low and throaty. "You speak like a *Malya*, *Sha* Shane! My grandfather would have been proud to have you raiding with him."

The guard-car braked to a halt abreast them before Shane could

reply. A panel in its metal side slid back. Two Martian *fala*s and a hairy, heavy-thewed Uranian sprang out.

**S**HANE triggered his light-pistol's exciter. The purple beam slashed through the dimness, straight to the breast of the first Martian.

A shrill scream of awful anguish burst from the creature's throat-sac. It leaped high in the air, then fell back again, a nerveless, dying heap.

The Uranian and the other *fala* whirled.

Shane lanced out the beam again. It took the top from the second *fala*'s misshapen skull.

The Martian was dead before he hit the floor.

But now the Uranian had light-pistols in two of his four huge hands. A beam seared through the cot. Another burned a smoking path along the floor.

Shane surged to his feet, carrying the cot with him like a massive shield. The muscles of his back and arms and shoulders stood out. With a mighty effort, he swung the cot clear of the floor and hurled it broadside at the Uranian.

The hairy behemoth jerked up his two free hands to ward it off. But a tangle of falling covers got in the way. The cot's weight and impact rocked him.

Shane blazed through the cot.

Sagging, the Uranian lurched back against the car. The acrid stench of his burning flesh billowed up in choking waves.

Only then, instead of falling, he lunged forward. Barely in time, Shane leaped aside, lancing in beam after beam.

Blindly, the Uranian charged past him, with no attempt to turn. Straight ahead the creature lunged —on, towards the guard-post's rear wall . . . the vocodor and the row of communication control switches below it.

"The alarm—!" Talu cried shrilly. She darted forward.

Shane caught her wrist and threw her bodily out of the way.

The Uranian crashed against the wall. One great hand swept the whole row of switches down.

An alarm bell jangled deafeningly.

**T**HE Uranian half-turned, as if to taunt them. Then his muscles, his joints, seemed to give way. He toppled forward . . . struck the floor with an echoing thud.

Shane spun about. His eyes sought Talu.

She stood pressed flat to the guard-post's wall now, dark face aglow with an excitement that was mingled with something close akin to panic. "The bell—"

"Forget it! Come on!"

Together, they raced for the glittering metal guardcar.

Shane sprang aboard. "Hurry!" He caught the slave girl's hand and helped her to clamber in after him.

Here, inside, a control panel studded with switches and dials and push-buttons was set chest-high in

one wall. Above it, a narrow, slot-like vision port of transparent silicon extended nearly to the top of the car. A series of charts, displayed beneath sheets of clear plastic cross-hatched with grid lines, flanked the port on either side.

Shane slammed shut the door. He pushed Talu to the instrument board. "Quick! The controls—how do they work?" The very clipped steadiness of his voice rang with urgency.

"It is simple—"

A red spark glinted in the vision port.

Shane froze to the slot. "Another car—coming this way, fast!"

Talu threw a switch. Her fingers flashed over the buttons.

Vibration shook the car.

Talu threw another switch.

With a rumble and roar, the vehicle began to move. Lights streaked past the vision ports, faster and faster.

Shane let out breath. "They're falling back!"

The dark girl pressed more buttons. The car jerked and changed direction, till it had veered from its former course three times. The lights of their pursuer disappeared. The car moved out onto a straightaway once more and picked up speed.

Talu turned. "Where now, *Sha Shane*?"

The Earthman laughed—harshly, without mirth. "The top is always the place to start, *Malyalara*. If you want to kill a snake, cut off its

head."

The woman looked at him with a sort of wondering awe. "You mean . . . Reggar?"

"I mean Reggar!" Shane echoed. His mouth twisted. "They say he cuts a figure when his raider ships come in on a helpless *Chonya* town. We'll see if he looks as bold when someone's hunting him!"

"But by now he knows you have escaped. He will be waiting—"

"He may. Or then, he may not. Most men Reggar has known asked only to get away."

The girl turned back to the controls. Again, the car veered, and again.

**O**NCE more, she faced the Earthman. She said. "Give me the light-gun now, *Sha Shane*. We must burn off your shackles while we have this chance."

Shane threw her a bleak smile. "You ride pressure well, *Malyalara*."

The girl's slim shoulders lifted in a shrug. "My grandfather said that pressure proved a man, *Sha Shane*." Already, the light-gun's purple beam was eating at the handcuff links.

"And Reggar—?"

"I have set the controls to take us to him. Five minutes will do it, if we are not cut off by his cars."

"But if we are—?"

"We still may find a way. There are twelve levels here, more corridors than can be counted—"

"Yet all on a slavers' moon? All Reggar's?"

"I do not know, *Sha Shane*. But Reggar is here; no other."

The last link holding the handcuffs broke. Talu straightened. "It will not be long—"

With startling suddenness, a bell clanged overhead.

"The crash alarm—!" Even as she cried out, the girl punched frantically at the control buttons.

The rear vision slot caught a gleam of red lights — dangerously close already; rushing at them headlong.

Barely in time, their own car veered right at an intersection.

The breath went out of Talu. Her knuckles stood out white beneath her skin.

Overhead, the collision bell clanged again.

This time, the other car hurtled out of a side passageway, cutting them off. Desperately, Talu manipulated the controls. They backed to the nearest cross-hall; fled down it as fast as the car would go.

Talu said: "They are hemming us in, *Sha Shane*. Reggar has guessed your thoughts."

*Shane's* hand knotted about the light-pistol's butt. "Can we still break clear? Is there a way?"

"If we could get to another level —"

"Try it!"

The girl's breath seemed to come a fraction faster. Her eyes caught the same reckless glint as *Shane's*. Her fingers flicked at the buttons.

Their car swung right. Ahead, a blank wall came rushing to meet

them.

"A shaft," said Talu. Her voice shook just a little.

JUST when it seemed that they must surely crash, the car slowed. Then, swiftly, they were dropping straight down, cushioned on a beam of force.

Three levels down, Talu threw a switch. The car swept out of the shaft and down a passageway.

The collision bell clanged.

Talu punched buttons.

Again, the bell.

More buttons.

Red lights, hurtling towards them.

" . . . another level—" Talu whispered.

They climbed a shaft at dizzying speed; rushed off through another corridor.

The bell. Buttons and switches. The bell again.

"They are hemming us in!" Talu choked. A ragged, desperate note had crept into her voice. "The corridors ahead are all dead ends—"

"Reggar—?"

"His quarters are not even on this level. Here there is only Kyrsis, the silver woman—"

"Kyrsis . . . "

The bell clanged.

The girl pressed a final button. Weariness, strain, defeat, were in her face. "We are trapped, *Sha Shane*. I am sorry . . . "

*Shane's* eyes were hot upon her. He laughed—a wild, fierce laugh that matched the reckless lines that

carved his face. "Trapped? Not yet, *Malyalara*; not yet!"

She stared at him in blank bewilderment.

"How do you reverse the car, *Malyalara*?"

The girl pointed to the button.

The bell set up new clamor. Red lights blazed in the rear vision port.

"Jump, Talu!" Shane threw the brake-switch.

She flung back the door; leaped wide.

**S**HANE jammed down the reverse button and sprang after the girl. He sprawled against the corridor wall as the empty car roared back towards their pursuer.

The other car's gears clashed in screaming protest. It shuddered under the braking action.

But too late. Shane's guard-car crashed into the other. The thunder of impact mingled with shrieks, and the scream of rending metal.

"Come on!" Shane cried. Light-gun in hand, he raced towards the wreck.

A third guard-car was already drawing up as they reached it. The panel door opened, and a lone *Pervod* leaped out.

Shane killed him with one slash of the light-beam.

Talu pulled herself up into the car and ran to the control board. The glow of excitement was back on her face once more. "Which way?" she cried.

The reckless glint in Shane's blue

eyes was brighter than ever now. "Turn it loose and let it run for a decoy," he said tightly. "Our work just now is here."

For a moment the girl stared at him, confusion written in her face. Then, wordless, she set the controls.

Together, they leaped clear. The car thundered out of sight.

Still unspeaking, Talu turned back to Shane once more, a hundred mute questions in her glance.

Shane chuckled. "We'll visit the woman," he said, "the silver woman, Kyrsis."

The girl's dark eyes went wide. "No! No, *Sha Shane*—!"

"Yes! Reggar's hemmed us in and tied us down. He thinks we're beaten. So now, we strike again, where it will sting and hurt the most. And where better than at his market, this Kyrsis?"

"Please, no—" The girl was pleading now.

"Yes!" the Earthman came back sharply. His voice took on a darkly brooding note, and his face set in rocky lines. "She is the key, *Malyalara*. She is the one who buys slaves in a universe where power is free. I'm going to ask her why."

## CHAPTER IV

**T**HE DOORS WERE protected by rigid barriers of projected force, and the light-pistol burned out before Shane had quite finished cutting through the wall. But he had taken a long knife from the dead

*Pervod* in the third guard-car. He finished the job with it.

So, finally, they were inside, crawling through an ever-murkier blackness while the silence hammered at them like a living thing.

And then, suddenly, out of the ebon stillness, a voice said: "Welcome, Earthman!"

A man's voice, this; or at least, a voice not of woman: not loud, but harsh and alien; not thunderous, but vibrant with savage power.

"Welcome, Earthman!" the voice repeated. "*Welcome to death!*"

Shane flung himself sidewise. He crashed against some piece of furniture. The burned-out light-gun clattered to the floor.

The voice mocked: "Can you not see me, Earthman? And your pistol—why do you not pick it up? Does the darkness get in your way?"

Somewhere—very far away, it seemed—Talu whispered raggedly: "*Sha* Shane . . . *Sha* Shane . . . "

Shane said: "Here, *Malyalara*. This way." He groped over the floor as if feeling for the now-useless pistol; slipped and fell flat, and under cover of it, slid the *Pervod*'s long knife out of view beneath his jacket.

"Shall I give you light, great *gar*?" the voice taunted. "Shall I let you see me now?"

Shane's moving hand touched the light-pistol. His fingers gripped it—but flat to the floor, not lifting it. Muscles flexed, he poised, eyes probing the darkness. His voice echoed defiance: "Show yourself if

you dare, *starbot*!"

"If I dare—!"

Like a quirst striking, Shane hurled the pistol at the voice.

The missile struck home with a meaty thud. A choked oath slashed the blackness.

**S**HANE lunged forward. But he crashed into more furniture and fell again. Before he could rise, lights blazed.

For the fraction of a second Shane froze. Then—very slowly, very carefully—he turned and pulled himself to his feet.

Talu was already up—breathing too fast, a hand at her throat. Her dark eyes were wide and set, riveted on an open doorway in the opposite wall.

A strange figure loomed hulk-like in the shadows there—a gaunt, raw-boned giant in the tree-leather garb of the space rovers, with a light-pistol hanging ready in one webbed hand.

Yet this was no ordinary wanderer. The difference stood out in line and stance—a weird note of deviation that caught the eye instantly, even in a universe where bizarre and norm were one.

And about the waist was drawn a great iron belt . . . Shane's belt, the belt of the asteroids.

Shane sucked in air.

The figure brought up one hand in a peremptory gesture of command.

Weapons poised, a half-dozen

guards moved through the doorway. Nondescripts, being drawn from the backwaters of strange planets, they fanned out in a silent, menacing arc before Shane and the slave girl.

Wordless, cold-eyed, Shane stared them down. They halted, hesitating.

Now the giant in the doorway stalked forward, clear of the shadows.

Numbly, almost, Talu took a dragging step towards the hulking goliath, then another . . . another . . .

"Out of the way, *Malya!* Let him see me!" The very repression that echoed in the giant's words was infinitely more fearsome than roars or rantings. A webbed fist lashed out backhanded at the slave girl, and the force of the blow sent her careening almost to Shane's side. "Remember me, Earthman? Remember?"

Shane did not move. He did not speak.

The creature standing there walked on two legs like a human. Its thumbs were opposed. It spoke through its mouth instead of a throat-sac.

**B**UT the great lobed eyes that saw in the dark were pure *Fantay*, and the scaly roughness of the mottled skin was *Pervod*. The bulge of the skull went with Mars; the peculiar, pad-footed stride with the swamplands of Io. Hybrid, mongrel, the thing was a queer, off-trail mixture of all the races of Mars and Earth and Venus, and the gods of the far stars knew where else.

And there, at its waist, hung the

belt of the *Chonyas*.

"I remember," Shane said. "You're Reggar, Quos Reggar—the slaver, the *theol*-peddler." Deliberately, insultingly, he spat on the floor. "Or are you running light-guns to Mimas this time?"

The creature that was Reggar chuckled, but the sound held no mirth. "Your memory's good, you *chitza!* Maybe it even goes back to the days when you passed the word through the spaceports that you'd feed my heart to the *kiavis* if I ever ramped ship in the asteroid belt again."

"I said it; I meant it." Shane's eyes were bleak. He stood unyielding, jaw outthrust, and his words slashed. "When the *chonya* chiefs came in and struck their banners and picked me, an Earthman, as *gar* of the asteroids to lead them, I swore on the starstone of Hiaroloch that I'd stop scum like you—"

"Only now I'm back," Reggar cut in harshly. "I'm bigger this time, Shane; big enough to make up for all the years I've had to stay away. My fleets are stronger than yours, and my brain is better. Today, when you broke free and fled, I said to myself: 'Where would the Earthman go? What will his first thought be?' And I know the way you think so well that I was here in Kyrsis' rooms before you!"

"So?"

"So I've taken your belt, and now I'm going to take your *yodor Chonyas*, too. I'll hit the asteroids, one

## IMAGINATION

after another, and clean them out, till there isn't a *Chonya* anywhere left free." The great lobed eyes glittered balefully. The alien voice struck a deeper note. "And you're going to help me, Shane!"

"You're mad as a *ban*, Reggar," Shane said tightly.

"Mad? You call me mad?" There was a sort of obscene glee in the other's chuckle. "Is it mad to strive for power, great *gar*—the kind of power you've held these years? Is it mad to hunt slaves for a market that pays triple prices and begs for more? No! That's why I brought you here—"

"Here or a million miles across the void, what makes you think I'd help you?" Shane slashed savagely. Beneath the jacket, his fingers caressed the hilt of the *Pervod* knife. "For that matter, how could I help you? Do you see the *Chonya* chiefs as such fools that they'd follow me into your net, no matter what I said or did?"

**T**H E creature before him grinned hideously. "It won't be as hard as you tell it, Shane. The trick is to split the Federation — and there is where I need you."

"The Federation—?"

"Your acting falls short of your memory, Earthman. Your secret conference on the slave raids—I know about it. You should have been there by now; the meetings start tomorrow. When you don't appear, there'll be talk about the *Chonyas*

and *Malyas*, and how they always were slavers till the Federation beat them down."

"You talk nonsense, Reggar," Shane said curtly. But of a sudden his mouth seemed a trifle dry.

"Do I?" The alien voice rang with a note of dark triumph. "I have friends, Earthman . . . friends so respectable, so high-placed, that they would not admit that they even so much as knew my name. But they have their price, and so they still play my game. They will be there, at the conference. They will cry out that the *Chonyas* and *Malyas* are behind these raids as in the days gone by."

"And when we deny it—?"

"You'll have no chance to deny it. Reports will come in — confirmed reports that say the Earthman, Shane, great *gar* of the asteroids, has gone the *Chonya* way. That he, himself, is leading raiders, sweeping the lesser moons for slaves."

Bleakly, Shane stared at the creature. His fists clenched spasmodically, and knots of muscle stood out at the hinges of his jaws.

Then that, too, passed.

"A lie is a lie, Reggar," he said tonelessly. "Someplace, sometime, it always breaks down."

"But there will be no lie, great *gar*," the other mocked. "The reports will speak the truth. For as you say, a lie breaks down, and this is one time I dare not chance a gamble. So you will be out there in the void, in a *Chonya* raider ship. I my-

self shall supply it. A wild *Chonya* crew will man it, drawn from the dregs that you cast out of the asteroids when the chiefs came in and named you *gar*. Shane the slaver, the worlds will call you."

"And then?" clipped Shane.

**T**HE note of triumph in the mongrel's voice rose higher. A scaly fist came up, in a gesture that spoke of arrogance and power. "Chaos will sweep the void, Earthman—and I shall sweep the asteroids! The fools in the Federation will hang deadlocked for a time, for some still fear war more than they fear raiders. So long as that deadlock lasts, the void is mine! The *Chonyas* have given up their war fleets; they cannot strike back. Yet no matter how they cry of raids and beg for mercy, no one will believe them. My friends will talk of their pleas as stratagems to lure out the Federation fleet. And when at last the deadlock breaks and the war-heads roar down on Ceres and Pallas and the rest — why, what will it matter to me? For by then my slavers will have taken the last *Chonya* off and stripped the last rock bare!" The creature paused; hammered the two webbed hands together. "A well-laid plan, is it not, Earthman? Can you find even one small flaw?"

Shane stood motionless for a moment. Then, slowly, his lips twisted into the ghost of a smile. "Yes, Reggar, I find one."

The other eyed him curiously, with

an air that might have been a sort of repressed mirth. "And that one, great *gar*—?"

Shane said: "The flaw is me. For your plan to work I must go along. That leaves a decision in my hands: a choice. And I've already made it: no matter what you say or do, I'll have no part of your schemes." His jaw set. "You should have known that without my telling you, Reggar."

The mongrel nodded. Again, the strange note of mirth was in him. "Of course. I did know. As for choices—there are three, not two."

"Three choices—?"

"Three. The first, you may already know. We focussed a Paulsini beam on the ship that was carrying you to the meeting on the slave raids. The frequency of the impulses in your brain was changed. My will became yours. I forced you to come here."

"Yes?"

"It is your first choice. You know the pain when your brain's frequency is forced to change. But if you insist, I shall use it—take control of your body, send you out to raid as I would."

Shane breathed deeply. "And the second?"

"That is even better. You know what happens to a man whose blood has three times tasted *theol*?"

"Yes."

"I sent the woman"—Reggar gestured to Talu—"to you with an injector. It held *theol* . . . a special high-potency solution. If you wish,

you shall have the three full doses I'd planned for you. After that, I can send you anywhere without fear, for the *theol* will break your will like any other, and you'll do the things you're told to do and always come crawling back for more, and more, and more."

Shane shifted. He flicked a glance to Talu.

**S**HE had not moved from the spot where she had fallen. Dark eyes unfathomable, face expressionless, she lay there, following Reggar's every gesture.

"Do my choices hit you so hard you cannot speak?" sneered Reggar. "Surely the great Shane would not crawl like an *etavi*, even before he hears my third offer?"

Shane folded his arms and met the creature's glare. His hand clenched on the hilt of the hidden knife. "There's been no groveling yet, Reggar. For my part, there'll be none. Get on with your babblings!"

"I like this third choice best of all," the other said, and his voice now was almost silky. "It is so simple, too! You raid as a 'slaver under me; of your own free will, you do my bidding: that is all."

"All—?"

"Your word is good across the void, Earthman. I, too, trust it. Pledge me on your soul that you'll serve me as faithfully and well as you know how, take my interests as yours, and you shall leave here as free as any man who ever breathed."

Again the hideous grin split Reggar's face. He rocked with harsh, horrible laughter.

"Do it, Earthman! I beg you, do it! It would be the sweetest revenge of all—you, Shane, *gar* of the asteroids, turning slaver to save your own worthless skin! You, the legend, the man without fear, crushing down your precious *Chonyas* rather than walk the other paths I've offered! Your name linked with mine, your fate in my hands by your choice—"

"One question, Reggar—" Shane broke in. Under cover of his folded arms, he drew the *Pervod* knife half clear. His weight was on the balls of his feet, now; his muscles ready.

"What—?"

"Will your loot buy back your soul from hell when the maggots are eating through your brain?"

"What?"

**S**HANE'S voice rose to sudden thunder: "Armor your heart, too, Reggar! The *kiavis'* teeth are sharp, and I swear they'll feed on you and the scum that ride with you! I'll see you dead, and your head will rot on a pike at the gates of Ceresta—"

The mottling on the mongrel's face turned livid.

"You want chaos, Reggar? Cry chaos, then! Because if chaos comes, your death comes with it! The *Chonya* war fleet will hunt you down—"

"You *starbo!*" roared Reggar.\*

He lunged at Shane.  
Talu, the slave girl, cried out.  
The guards rushed forward.  
Shane moved like a leaping tiger.  
The knife was out, his muscles flexing. A shout of wild triumph rose in his throat.

Again Talu screamed.  
Something struck Shane behind the knees—a heavy impact, hard and low.

He lurched—off balance, toppling. His blow went wild.

The next instant Reggar smashed him in the face. The knife flew out of his hand. A guard sledged him from behind.

Shane crashed to the floor. Desperately, he jerked up knees and elbows; twisted, trying to shield himself from Reggar's savage kicks.

His hands slapped another body sprawled against his—the body that had knocked him down. His fingers knotted in silken hair.

Spasmodically, he jerked.  
A woman's sharp cry of pain rang out in answer.

It was Talu.

## CHAPTER V

THIS ROOM WAS large, and luxuriously furnished with the treasures of a score of satellites and planets. Here were rich tapestries from Orlon, a thousand blinding years in the making. Here, a table from Rhea, aglitter with the inlays of the spider men, delicate as the traceries of frost. Great *borvne*

crystals from the pits of Neptune had been transformed into lamps, their cold fire blazing like the play of sun on glacial ice. A priceless Grecian vase from Earth, older almost than time itself, created a world of its own in one corner.

But it was the woman who held all eyes . . . the silver woman.

She came forward now, a strange, shining creature. Her beauty was a breathless thing—ethereal, almost unreal. The cunningly-fashioned toga of silver cloth she wore matched the spun silver of her hair.

Yet her hair's silver could not have been that of age, for her skin still held the fresh glow of youth, though uniquely translucent and silvery itself—nearly as pale and clear as the bodies of Pluto's bloodless ice-things.

As if in studied contrast, her lips gleamed rich purple, more blue than red; and a hundred striking violet tints glinted in her eyes.

Even over the vocodor, her voice had a strange, alien lilt, as if her thoughts, her words, strained the unit's powers: "You . . . you are the Earthman—the *gar* of the asteroids . . . "

She came close to Shane as she spoke; very close, till the fragrance of unknown flowers rose in his nostrils. Her pale hands touched his cheeks, and the violet eyes probed his.

They were strange eyes, as strange as the worlds had ever seen—young and clear as a girl's, yet somehow

old, too . . . old as the void itself; and the things that were in them sent queer tremors rippling through Shane like a chill. It was as if the woman were looking beyond the things that others saw — probing deeper, searching for some precious secret element that only she could grasp.

"You are strong, Earthman!" she said softly, and now her voice held a throaty urgency, an undertone that might have told of inner tension. "There is life in you . . . much life. It flows hot in your veins . . ."

"He is not for you, *Shi Kyrsis!*" Reggar rasped harshly. "Our trap needs bait, and we cannot spare him!"

THE hands drew away from Shane's cheeks. The woman turned, and her violet eyes grew big and dangerous. "You cannot—?" she asked, her voice even softer than before. "Who says you cannot, Reggar?"

"We cannot, *Shi Kyrsis!*" Reggar answered. One webbed hand moved in an angry, incisive gesture. "We, the two of us, you and I. I cannot, because without him to serve as cover the Federation will sooner or later have my head. And you cannot, because without me there will be no slaves."

The woman's hands cupped, as if the long, purple-nailed fingers held some priceless goblet. "But life is a sacred thing!" she whispered. "It runs so strong within him . . ."

"It runs stronger than you know," Quos Reggar slashed back bitterly. "He is a legend, a madman who has carved his destiny across the void." He slapped the great *Chonya* belt that girded him. "Do you think that weakness won this belt? He is built of blood and iron! Even I confess it, though I hate him. But you cannot let yourself think of that now. For he must live, and he must raid, and he must be seen, if we are to break the power of the Federation and open up the void to slaving. Trust me, I know—"

Shane said: "I once knew a man who trusted Reggar. They were partners together in their dirty business, and as thick as thieves could get. When my blockade—"

"Shut up!" roared Reggar.

"When my blockade drove the slavers out of the asteroids, these two were trapped off Juno—"

Reggar sprang at Shane—webbed hands clutching, great lobed eyes a-flame.

But the silver woman, Kyrsis, came between them. Gently, she said, "I'll hear him out, Reggar."

Shane smiled thinly. "When I ordered the pair of them to surrender, Reggar, here, came to me secretly, and offered to send me the partner's head if I'd let him—Reggar—go on a promise that he'd never ramp ship in the asteroid belt again. I agreed, and he brought the head."

"You *chitza!*" screamed Reggar. With agility amazing for his size,

he leaped past the woman called Kyrsis.

Shane tried to dodge, but the guards who flanked him seized him.

Reggar struck him across the mouth.

Shane slumped back. He would have fallen but for the guards.

**T**HEN the woman's voice came —sharp, icecold: "I would not do that again, Reggar, if I were you . . . if I wished to live!" And then, to Shane: "Is there more?"

Blood trickled from Shane's mouth. He swayed, and a crooked grin twisted his swollen lips. "Only one thing, *Shi Kyrsis*," he mumbled. "The partner was Tas Reggar—this creature's brother!"

"He lies!" snarled Reggar. "He lies in his teeth like the *chitza* he is! I have no brother—"

"Perhaps not — now!" Shane baited. "How could you have? You sent me his head in a sack!"

A sound of incoherent fury bubbled in Reggar's throat. The great lobed eyes were flecked with red. Again he sprang at Shane.

But again the silver woman came between them. The violet eyes were probing, thoughtful. "The story has a ring to it, Reggar—a twist that somehow fits you."

The other's mottled face contorted. The webbed hands clenched into fists. "It is a lie!" he snarled thickly. And then, in a voice that still trembled with repression: "I have no brother. I had none. But even if

the tale were true, what difference would it make? We are here, together—"

Shane said: "What difference? For one thing, it would let her know whose neck would stretch, whose blood would spurt, if the time again came for you to make a choice. You'd cut her throat and save your own—"

"Silence!" roared the giant mongrel. He pivoted to face the woman. "Can you not see this *yodor* Earthman's goal, *Shi Kyrsis*? Is it not plain enough that he seeks to brew distrust between us, in the hope that out of it he can snatch a chance to break us both, and save his hide and his beloved *Chonyas*?"

Slowly, the woman nodded. "Perhaps . . . yes, probably."

"And is there anyone but me who'll bring you slaves by the thousands?" Reggar pressed on, relentless. "Where else can you find these lives you're seeking?"

The woman made no answer. "But why?" Shane cut in fiercely. "Where is your home, that you still need slaves? Work is for machines, and power is free. Why throw away living beings upon it?"

The silver woman stared. "You mean—you do not know—?"

"No! Quiet!" choked Reggar. "Have you gone mad, *Shi Kyrsis*? This man would destroy us. He must not know."

The silver woman looked from the mongrel to Shane and back again. "Then . . . how do you plan—?"

**Q**UOS Reggar shrugged. "The *theol* will make him ours. Three injections, spaced one Earth day apart, give the habit." He turned, leered at Shane. "Do you know about *theol*, great *gar*? Have you heard what it does—how it paralyzes the will of even the strongest?"

"I know," Shane answered bleakly. "Call it madness, not habit. It works on the brain a hundred times worse than wormwood—and a thousand times faster."

"You live for it," the mongrel nodded, chuckling. "Night and day, you dream of it, they say. You'll steal for it, fight for it, kill for it. With every dose, you need it more. And nowhere is there a cure."

Shane said nothing.

Reggar gestured to the guards.

They caught Shane's arms once more; held him rigid.

Reggar drew an injector from inside his tunic; then a bottle. Quickly, he filled the needle and inserted the gas ampule.

Still Shane stood silent, stoney-faced.

Kyrsis said: "Why must you have it this way, Earthman? Give your sworn word that you'll serve us, and Reggar will put away the *theol*."

"I'd rather take the *theol*," Shane answered tightly.

"But why, Earthman? Why?"

Shane's laugh was bitter, curt. "It is a thing you would not understand, *Shi Kyrsis*. On Earth, they call it conscience."

A shadow seemed to pass across

the silver woman's pale, lovely face. The violet eyes were suddenly uncertain. "I—I do not know . . ."

"You never will," Shane answered. Coldly, contemptuously, he met her gaze. "But the time will come, I promise you, when you'll know that I did not lie about Reggar—that no matter what he says, you cannot trust him. Even now—here, today, this very minute—he is planning to betray you."

"But how—?"

"Why bother to tell you more? You would not believe me. But when the day arrives, say to yourself just once, 'I had my chance; the Earthman warned me'."

"Hold him tight!" Reggar warned the guards angrily. "The *theol* will put an end to his mumblings!"

**H**E came close to Shane. A webbed hand twitched the Earthman's head. The injector poised close to the sun-tanned throat.

Shane went completely limp. Dead weight, he sagged loose in the guards' hands.

They swayed under the drag of him; shifted, trying to regain their balance.

Shane writhed in a savage, spasmodic effort to break free. He kicked hard at Reggar.

But the guards' hold held. Reggar twisted out of the way of the kick. He jerked Shane's head around by the hair.

"It ends here, *chitza*!"

Face contorted in ghoulish tri-

umph, he drove the injector's plunger home.

The *theol* sprayed into Shane's throat . . .

## CHAPTER VI

**T**HEY were singing in the dungeons—a wild *Chonya* song that had echoed down through the reckless years since that fateful day when the first great raider ship blasted off from the asteroids across the void:

*"Oh, they've hunted us for ages,  
Through the Belt and to the  
stars;  
They have sought advice of sages,  
And they've set up puppet gars.  
But there's Chonya blood within  
us,  
And when Chonyas take their  
stand,  
There'll be blood upon the  
hatches  
And a blight upon the land!"*

"My whole crew?" Shane asked tonelessly.

One of the Martian *fala*s of the escort nodded.

"Then why bother with me? They can tell you as much about the ship as I."

The *fala* shrugged. But a *Pervod* snarled: "The fools will do nothing without your orders—not even tell us which are the technicians. We broke the captain's back, but still he refused to explain the mechanism."

Shane's blue eyes grew cold as the

pits of Neptune. "He's dead, then?"

"Yes, and so will the rest of them be, unless you tell them to obey."

"I'll give them their orders," Shane answered curtly. The muscles were standing out along his jaws.

They moved on, into the dungeon's outer room, where crowding *Chonyas* shouted their hate and shook the bars.

A crewman with a bloody bandage about his head leaped onto a bench and, pointing, cried out, "*Gar Shane!*"

The singing died away.

"Your first trick is your last!" the guard in charge snarled in Shane's ear. Roughly, he shoved the Earthman forward.

Shane strode through the settling silence. Wordless, he looked about him—at the glittering, unbreachable, green telonium walls; at the lean, tough horde of *Chonya* crewmen, pressing hot-eyed and intense against the bars; at the guards who flanked and backed him, light-guns out and lance-prods ready.

**H**E swung back till again he faced the *Chonyas*; took a step or two with a reckless swagger. His back was stiff, his head unbowed.

In a hard flat voice he said: "These slavers who hold us here want full technical data on the Abaquist meteor repellers on our ship. Already, they have broken your captain's back because he would not give it to them."

The silence echoed.

"We were brought here with our minds locked in the control of a Paulsini beam. Through it, these *starbos* can drag out our innermost thoughts—force us to do their will. They would use it on us now, if they could. But they have insulated this whole satellite against it, so it is useless so long as we are here."

Still there was no sound, save for the restless scrape of feet, the rustle of heavy breathing.

"We are their prisoners, utterly and completely. They have even taken away the belt your chieftains gave me—" Shane ran his hands along his waist. "the *Chonya* belt, the great iron belt of the asteroids."

The scraping and rustling grew louder. A low, guttural rumble ran through the crowd.

"They say they'll cut us down if we do not obey them, and they've smeared their hands in your captain's blood to prove it!"

From somewhere in the back of the crowd, a *Chonya* shouted, "Where do you stand, *Gar* Shane? What would you have us do?

"I?" Shane swept them with his gaze. "I? What would you have me say? We are their prisoners, are we not? They have conquered us, even if by a trick. We have no choice but to do their will . . . for now." He paused; laughed harshly, cynically. "Were I to tell you otherwise, I, too, would die within the moment—and we all know it."

The captive crew flung back his bitter laughter. The first flush of

hate was washed from the fierce faces, replaced by narrowed eyes and calculating glances.

Shane called: "Repeller crew—forward!" And then, quickly: "Orshawn . . . Dylar . . . Hebza . . . Tisban . . . Korch—"

**M**EN pressed through to the bars. Without waiting, Shane wheeled to the guards. "Here are your men—the repeller crew itself! They will give you everything."

A *fala* shoved him aside, against the bars of the cage. A Mercurian threw the lever that controlled the lock.

Barely audible, one of the *Chonyas* whispered, "*Gar* Shane! You know—?"

"—that the repeller is fully automatic? That there is no crew?" Shane bared his teeth in the caricature of a smile. His eyes were very hard and bright. "Yes, *Chonya*; I know."

Now the crewmen that Shane had named were out. The door of bars clanged shut again.

A Thorian caught the Earthman by the arm. "Get on! And if these dogs of the asteroids do not tell us all Quos Reggar wants to know, both you and they will die by inches!" He cuffed Shane towards the dungeon's entrance.

Shane reeled ahead, half falling, and the guards laughed at the sight of him; and one booted him from behind so that he nearly sprawled on the glistening green telonium.

floor. But he clutched the outer door and recovered, hanging by the edge of it as it swung on its hinges till he was almost into the corridor beyond.

Only two guards remained there, both *Pervods*.

The fire in Shane's cold blue eyes burst into wild, singing flame. Of a sudden the laxness left his face. The awkwardness fell from his stance.

"Now, *Chonyas!*" he shouted.

In the same instant he whirled and shoved the great door open with all his might.

The edge caught the first of the guards behind him, a *fala*, full in the face.

Shane leaped upon the creature as it staggered. He caught the barrel of the thing's light-pistol; wrested it away.

With a hoarse cry the guard sprang after him, clawing for the weapon.

Rock-steady, Shane triggered the exciter. The pistol's purple beam struck the *fala* full in the face. Still clawing—clawing in the agonies of death, now—the creature lurched backward.

Beyond it boiled a scene of strange, wild carnage. The *Chonyas* of Shane's mythical "repeller crew" had leaped upon the other guards—tearing away weapons, beating them down.

Now one wrenched the ray-key that activated the locking lever

from the Mercurian and slammed it home. The bolt that held the door of bars lifted.

With a wild roar, the *Chonyas* inside the cage burst forth.

The *Pervods* in the corridor beyond the dungeons rushed to bar the great outer door.

Shane blasted the first before he had even crossed the threshold.

The second turned to flee.

The Earthman's light-beam caught him in the middle of his first step.

A *Chonya* came running, a bloody lance-prod in his hands, eyes blazing with excitement. "Gar Shane! What now? The ship—?"

"You know where it is?"

"Yes. Close by here—"

"No matter. Get the men aboard and man the guns. Blast all the corridors but one. I'll need that to get back to you."

"But where—?"

"There's a job to do before we leave, if we're not to be dragged back here as we were before."

"The Paulsini—!"

"Right!" Shane laughed harshly. The sheer joy of battle shone in his face. "They'll expect us to blast off the instant the crew's aboard."

The *Chonya*'s eyes gleamed fiercely. "You'll need help—"

"Three men, and a guard to guide us—"

The *Chonya* laughed aloud. "Two others and a guard, Gar Shane! I am the first!" he cried, exulting.

Commands crackled, then, and

other crewmen crowded forward; and in brief seconds Shane and the *Chonyas* and a bloody-headed, bewildered Uranian were roaring down the echoing dimness of the corridor in a guard-car.

THEN, on the Uranian's order, they changed direction, and now they were hurtling through vast, high-ceilinged chambers where giant machines stood row on row in countless thousands. No living being was anywhere evident . . . only the machines, churning endlessly at their task with cold efficiency.

"Converters!" Shane muttered, half beneath his breath. "Power converters . . . A different kind, one I've never seen before."

"Nor I," a *Chonya* technician at his side echoed grimly. "Who needs such power today, *Gar* Shane? And the source—where is it? It would take whole seas of energy to feed these monsters. There are too many!"

"Too many," Shane nodded. For a long moment he peered through the vision slot in silence, then backed away again. "A slaver is a slaver, Dylar. Some are small, and some are big. But this is too big for any slaver. The whole surface of this moon is covered with a rabbit-warren such as this, twelve levels deep. We find power converters by the million—more than a major planet could use, even in the days before the Federation began to broadcast free power to all."

Another of the *Chonyas* broke in now: "The Uranian says the Paul-sini lies just beyond the next stop, *Gar* Shane—and his fear runs too high for him to lie."

Shane studied the great, hairy beast through narrowed eyes. "Is there a guard?" he clipped.

The Uranian shook his head jerkily.

"Get ready, then!" the Earthman rapped. Again his eyes sought out the Uranian, and after a moment he gestured towards him. "Shove him off first, and then land running."

The guard-car slowed.

Shane shaded his eyes and studied the dim spaces ahead through the vision port, the light-pistol ready in his hand.

Then the car was swaying, grinding to a stop. Two of the *Chonyas* pushed the Uranian towards the door.

But before they reached it their prisoner suddenly sprang aside. He caught one of the crewmen and hurled him bodily through the doorway by brute strength.

OUTSIDE, the corridor was suddenly laced with lances of purple light. A scream of anguish choked off in the *Chonya's* throat.

"A trap!" the technician, Dylar, cried. He jerked back levers on the control panel, and the car lurched forward again.

The Uranian lunged for him.

But Shane was already pivoting.

He fired as he moved, and the great beast slammed to the floor, its four mighty arms flailing in a death-spasm.

"Stop the car!" Shane shouted.

Dylar threw a switch. The vehicle's mechanism shuddered and went dead.

"This way!" the Earthman snapped. He leaped to the corridor and ran back towards the Paulsini station. The *Chonyas* followed, close on his heels.

More of Reggar's men were there, clustered about the body of the fallen crewman. Then the sound of running feet reached them. They whirled.

Not even breaking stride, Shane blasted at them. Hastily, they fell back into a doorway, the same doorway from which they had loosed their barrage at the guard-car.

The Earthman moved in close to the left wall, out of their range of vision, and crept closer.

Abruptly, a purple beam lanced past his head, so close he could feel the searing heat of it. He jerked back against the crewman behind him.

"It's a stalemate till we can think of something," he clipped savagely. "They can't move, but neither can we."

The *Chonya* laughed. "Dylar will take care of that!" he chortled gleefully.

Like an echo, the now distant guard-car roared to life again. The next instant it was racing towards

them.

Shane and the *Chonya* pressed back against the wall.

The car hurtled past them. A light-beam slashed from it as it came abreast the doorway where the guards were huddled.

There was a flurry of motion; hoarse shouts of panic.

Shane and the other *Chonya* moved in.

The last of Reggar's men sought to flee. But the technician, Dylar, cut them down.

Then Shane was bursting into the place where the great Paulsini mind-control projector was housed.

IT was an awesome sight, a shaft that seemed to stretch away to infinity overhead. And in its center stood the incredible Paulsini tube, that infinitely delicate electronic unit that was the heart of the projector, core of the whole weird device that so deftly changed the frequencies of the waves within men's brains. A gigantic tube, almost unbelievable, so large that it staggered the imagination.

Even Shane stood half-incredulous as he stared up at it.

"It must be a hundred feet tall!" he said numbly. "No wonder they can reach out into space—"

Dylar nodded. "Yes. The whole center floor of the shaft is a huge lift, a hydratomic elevator to push the tube up into the air above this structure that covers the surface." He pointed a quivering finger. "See!

There is a great lid capping off the shaft! No doubt it is linked to the lift mechanism so that it opens as the tube rises—”

Behind them, the other *Chonya* suddenly slammed shut the corridor door. “Guard-cars!” he called tensely. “A whole line of them, headed this way!”

It broke the spell of Shane's fascination.

“Our only hope for getting away from this moon alive is to smash this projector,” he clipped tightly.

“And that means—smash this tube,” Dylar answered. “Any other thing that we might do could be repaired.”

Shane strode to the tube; hammered savagely at the transparent silicon with his light-gun’s butt.

“It is no use,” the *Chonya* technician told him grimly. “A tube as incredibly huge as this one will stand up against anything smaller than a proton cannon. It has been designed for strength — to handle power . . . temperature changes . . . shock and impact . . . the sheer weight of its own structure.” He shook his head. “I fear we’ve come here for nothing, *Gar* Shane. No efforts of ours can hope to smash this.”

**B**LEAKLY, Shane stared at the monster tube . . . at the glittering metal of the lift on which it stood . . . at the great shaft, rising high above them to the cap of the dome.

The *Chonya* at the door said: “They’re unloading here by hundreds, and they’ve brought enough equipment for a siege! When they start moving in, there’ll be no stopping them.”

Dylar’s eyes flicked swiftly about the shaft. “There may be another way out—”

“No!” Shane snapped. His jaw was hard. He brought up a clenched fist; shook it grimly. “We came here to smash this thing. We’re going to do it.” He turned on his heel and ran to the nearest door. “Come on! We’ve got to find the control room!”

“The control room—?”

“Here! This is the place!” It was a windowless cubicle, but with a second door set opposite the one by which Shane stood. He scanned the massive control panels, the complicated dials and instruments. “Quick! How do you start the lift?”

Outside, the other *Chonya* called: “They’re coming! I’ll try to hold them—!” His voice was a trifle ragged.

“The lift—?” Dylar stared at the Earthman. “But why—?”

“Forget ‘why’!” Shane slashed fiercely. “Quick! Show me!”

The technician scanned the maze of instruments. “This must be it! See! Here is the linking mechanism that couples it to the shaft cap, so that the top opens as the tube rises—”

Out beyond the shaft, something crashed. “They’re trying to smash

in the door!" the crewman there shouted. "There—! I got him!"

Shane whipped up his light-pistol. Face etched with strain, he focussed the beam on the linking mechanism. Wires gave way.

Dylar stared.

Gears twisted under the heat of the beam. A shaft snapped.

"Start the lift!" Shane clipped between clenched teeth.

"Of course!" cried Dylar. He threw switches.

"Here they come!" the Chonya outside shouted.

The next instant, his voice bubbled off in a scream. Shane leaped to the doorway, lanced a beam of light as a tentacled Thorian came into view. The creature slid back out of range.

The Earthman shot a glance at the Paulsini tube.

Smoothly, silently, it was rising, climbing swiftly towards the top of the shaft.

A *fala* hurled a lance-prod at Shane. It grazed his ribs. The sting of it hurt. Cursing, he dropped to one knee and triggered a beam at the Martian.

"It's almost there!" Dylar cried. Shane risked another glance.

Even as he looked, the end-of the tube reached the dome. For an instant it seemed to hesitate there. Then, with a faint groaning as of machinery under strain, it thrust on again . . . harder . . . harder . . . harder

The machinery of the lift groaned louder.

"Watch out!" shouted Dylar.

Shane leaped back in the same fraction of a second that the great tube burst. The noise was like a thunder-clap. It was as if the tube had exploded in mid-air. Shane glimpsed a Uranian racing towards him, and knew that he had waited too long, that he could never bring his pistol up in time; then saw the hairy thing reduced to bloody pulp by a great shard of blast-driven silicon.

It broke the paralysis that gripped him. He caught Dylar's arm. "Come on! Quick! To the ship!"

"Through that horde in the corridor?" The technician shook his head. "No, *Gar* Shane. You have performed a miracle—but not even you can travel that road."

A woman's voice said: "Then come this way."

Shane and the *Chonya* whirled.

She stood in the shadows of the control room's second doorway—a slim, shining figure in a toga of silver cloth.

Shane said: "Kyrsis—!"

"Yes, Shane." Her voice still had its strange, alien lilt. The rich purple lips parted in a smile, and she reached for his hand. "Come quickly. I shall take you to your ship."

"To the ship—?" Shane stared at her blankly. "But why—?"

"Why?" She laughed softly, and now there was mockery in the violet eyes. "Why not, Shane? It is

the only way you can hope to escape this moon of madness. And the reason I help you to escape is—I want you to take me with you!"

## CHAPTER VII

NOW they were hurtling through the utter blackness that was space, away from the bleak moon that had been their prison. To port, Jupiter loomed monstrous, overwhelming, its great Red Spot weirdly aglow with seas of flaming hydrogen that seethed and boiled amid gigantic ice-cliffs carved from frozen gases. On the other side, Ganymede and Callisto swung slowly in their orbits; and beyond them, dwarfed by them, tiny Jupiter IX raced through the sky in the counter direction.

A navigator said: "The place they held us is Jupiter V—the satellite closest to the planet. The manuals say it is abandoned now. But it was built up as a power station by the Jupiterian entente in the days before the Federation began to broadcast energy."

"And now Quos Reggar holds it," the mate echoed. "What is your command, *Gar* Shane? Shall we ramp at Europa and report it?"

Bleakly, Shane stared into the visiscreen. Gadar, the dark star, hurled across the void into the solar system a thousand years ago, was coming into view now, the faint silver gleam of its profile barely visible.

"Or we could try Callisto," the mate went on. "They would notify

the Federation unit stationed at Europa—send out patrols—"

"No," Shane said. "No. We'll go on to Federation headquarters, the Martian meeting. The things we have to tell will mean more there."

Abruptly, he turned and left the pilot room, and made his way to Kyrsis' quarters.

She came to his knock, and a glow of pleasure suffused her pale, silvery face at the sight of him. "Enter Shane . . ." The cool fingers touched his hand, drew him in. The violet eyes clung to his, as if in the sharing of some precious secret.

He closed the door behind him; breathed in deeply. "Why did you choose to come with me, Kyrsis?"

The rich purple lips curved and parted. As always, her eyes seemed to mock him. "How many times have you asked me, Shane?"

"How many times—?" he echoed, and now his voice had a bitter ring. "I wish I knew. But still I have no answer." He strode to the visiscreen across the room and snapped it on with an angry flick. Stared broodingly into it.

Gadar was almost to the screen's center now.

SHANE said: "You're like that dark star, Kyrsis. What men can see is beautiful — but beneath the surface you're both all mystery. Where did you come from? Where are you going? And why? I always come back to that one question: why, why, why?"

She came very close to him, then, and what might have been sorrow was in her face, her eyes. "I've told you, Shane. To me, life is a sacred thing . . . more sacred than you can ever dream. To see it wasted as yours would have been is the sin above all sin. And there was Reggar. After you'd told me the things you did, how could I believe him? How could I trust him? I had to get away from him, and quickly. If I could do it and save you, too, would I not have been a fool to throw away the chance?"

He turned on her. "But where is your home—your moon, your planet? Why do your people need slaves—?"

She shook her head sadly. "I am sorry, Shane . . . truly sorry. But those secrets are not mine to tell . . . unless—"

"Unless what—?"

"Unless you are willing to travel with me . . . to take the road Quos Reggar took." Again her hand was on his arm, her silvery body close to his. A note of tension crept into her voice. "Because we need slaves, Shane! You cannot know how desperately we need them! Nor is it hard. They do not suffer . . ."

For a moment the Earthman stood there with her, and her hand left his arm and came up to caress his cheek. "If you would but learn to understand us . . . there is so much to learn."

Shane swayed a little. His blue eyes dulled, and his breathing was

shallow, uneven.

The woman's eyes mirrored indefinable things, things old beyond all measure.

Shane stood rigid. Then, jerkily, he pulled away.

"I don't care why you need slaves," he said thickly. "It doesn't matter how you treat them—"

The silver woman spread her hands. "You see—?"

"But your people could work out a better way—"

"No." The word rang final. "For us there is—can be—no better way."

Shane's lips twisted. The dullness was gone from his eyes now. "Then, Kyrsis, we can never meet. You have picked your people's road, and I have taken the *Chonya* way."

"But then—"

"There can be nothing more. But you saved my life, and I must buy it back. So I'll land you at Horla, on Mars, and set you free, and you can go your way."

He turned to go.

Then the woman said: "Your throat, *Gar* Shane!"

The Earthman pivoted, face hard. "Yes?"

"There are flecks of green beneath the jaw—a slight eruption of the skin."

"I saw it in a mirror a while ago," Shane answered tightly. "It goes with *theol*."

"The first injection," the silver woman nodded, and now her smile was lazy, taunting. "With the second, the welts grow darker. After

the third there are . . . more obvious symptoms."

"You saved my life," Shane said, thin-lipped. "I'll see you safe to Mars."

He wheeled and left the room.

**T**HE committee on the interterrestrial slave trade was listening to a speaker from Titan when Shane reached the Federation chambers.

"Slavers? I can give you two names for slavers!" the Titanian cried out in a frenzy. "One is *Chonya* and the other is *Malya*! And those are the names for 'pirate,' too, and 'cutthroat' and 'thief' and 'hypocrite'!"

Grim-faced, Shane started forward.

A basilisk-eyed Mercurian with a sly and smirking air barred his way. "Your credentials, please. You cannot enter the chamber without credentials."

"I left my credentials with a mongrel outlaw named Quos Reggar," Shane clipped tightly. "He ambushed my ship on the way. The chairman, the delegates — any of them can identify me."

"My deepest regrets, but identification is not enough." The Mercurian was openly grinning now. "My orders are specific: regardless of excuse, there will be no admission without credentials."

"The *Chonyas* and *Malyas* have made the asteroid belt a space-ship graveyard!" the Titanian ranted shrilly.

"Get me the chairman!" Shane rapped.

"My orders are specific," the Mercurian repeated, smirking. "The issue of your attendance has already been discussed, Earthman, and you are barred—"

Shane raised his hand, tried to flag attention.

The chairman looked quickly away. Committee members turned till their backs were to him, or else openly ignored him.

"They have looted the void for a thousand years!" the Titanian screamed. "When we finally put that down, they grew clever, and now they wail of raids, even while they re-energize their proton cannon and hose the blood from their hatches —"

A sudden, mirthless grin twisted Shane's face.

"You lie in your teeth!" he shouted. Slamming the Mercurian to one side, he strode forward.

**T**HE Titanian cut off in mid-breath, great blue-green wattles shaking. Committee members spun about.

"Order!" bellowed the chairman, hammering on his desk. "Order in the chamber!"

"To hell with your order!" Shane shouted back savagely, eyes blazing. "I said he lied. I'll back it!"

"The *Chonya* delegate must wait his turn. He must clear his credentials—"

"Let someone wait who has yet

to count his dead! I'm here to see that the *Chonyas* get justice and an end to slavery, not words! I'll stay till action's taken!"

A rubbery, flat-faced Europan leaped up. "And why were you not here before? Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"Yes!" roared a delegate from Ganymede. "Eye-witnesses already have told us that the *Chonyas* are raiding for slaves again—and there are those who say that you, *gar* of the *Chonyas*, raid with them—that a raid is what kept you absent here—"

"My chrew will tell you—"

"Your crew?" rasped a Venusian *Vansta*. "Your *Chonya* crew? Who ever heard of a *Chonya* with a mote of truth within him?"

A wave of raucous laughter swept through the chamber.

Then the delegate from Earth was on his feet, a tall, heavy man with thinning hair. "Silence!" he thundered. "Silence!"

The laughter, the shouts, died away.

The Earth delegate addressed Shane: "There is a woman called Kyrsis, of an unknown race, who is known to have been buying slaves. Do you know her?"

"Yes, but—"

"And is it true that when you landed at the Horla spaceport, less than an hour ago, this woman was with you?"

"Yes—"

"That you knew her to have been buying slaves, yet you let her go

free, instead of turning her over to the constituted authorities?"

"But she—"

"Answer yes or no: is it true?"

"Yes, but—"

"'Buts' have no place in this committee, Shane!" The Earth delegate swung about. "My fellow-members. I am ashamed to confess that this renegade came from Earth. Now, as Earth delegate, the least I can do to atone is to demand, in the name of Earth, that he be placed under arrest as a slaver; and that the *Chonyas* whom he leads be expelled from the Federation, placed outside the protection of its laws, and subjected to an immediate punitive campaign by the Federation fleet to destroy their sovereignty and reduce them to the status of wards of the Federation!"

FOR the fraction of a second, silence echoed. Then the great room exploded into a cacophony of hate, a tumult of affirmation: "Yes, yes—!" "Seize him!" "Jail him!" "Burn him down!"

Two uniformed *Fantays* and the Mercurian from the door rushed towards Shane.

The Earthman stood as if frozen in his tracks. Then, explosively, he leaped backward, twisting, and of a sudden the light-pistol that had swung at his hip was in his hand.

"Who dares to seize me?"

The *Fantays*, the Mercurian, stopped short.

Blue eyes contemptuous, cold as

death, Shane looked from them to the delegates . . . the chairman. "I'm going out now," he said.

No answer came . . . no comment or sound save that of the crowd's loud, nervous breathing.

"I'm going," he repeated savagely. "I'm going because the Federation holds knaves and fools enough that decent men no longer dare feel safe within it. The truth finds a graveyard here, and justice hangs in chains. Better to fight you and the slavers both than count on your weak-kneed aid. From this moment on, the *Chonyas* will carve their own way."

Not one of them would meet his eyes.

"No comments, no arguments?" The Earthman laughed sourly; he brought up the light-gun in a gesture that held at once both menace and defiance. "Then I'll leave you now. You may follow me—if you dare!"

Boldly, not even glancing back, he strode out of the room.

## CHAPTER VIII

"THIS is the place," the Chonya said. "This is where the silver woman came."

Shane studied the structure. It was a house — a sort of fortress-dwelling in the ancient *Fantay* style, set a hundred feet from its nearest neighbor. Even in the semi-darkness of the early Martian night it looked old, mouldering old. Light from Phobos and Deimos, the tiny

moons that raced across the sky overhead, glinted on the bosses that studded the great iridium-alloy door, and the weathered walls of *lyndyse* stone rose sheer and blank and forbidding to the second floor. Even there, the windows showed as narrow streaks of yellow light, criss-crossed with heavy bars.

"We are not the only ones drawn by this place, *Gar Shane*," the *Chonya* went on. "There was a *Malya*, a tough young buck with the walk of a fighting man. He stayed in the shadows, surveying the house from every angle, but not going near. After awhile, he went away. Then, later, a *Europan* came, a flat-faced *chitza* who looked this way and that, as if he were afraid he would be seen. He knocked at the door, and after they'd checked him through a peephole, they let him in. Later, there were three others, all shrouded in *jala* capes so I could not tell their race. They, too, went in."

"And none came out?"

"Only the *Europan*. He skulked away again in but a few moments."

"A *Malya*, a *Europan*, and three in *jala* cloaks," Shane repeated, half to himself. And then, speaking to the *Chonya*: "It's time we found out what black brew is cooking there, Nettar. Where are the hook and rope?"

"Here, *Gar Shane*," the other answered. He drew a coiled line and grappling iron from beneath his coat. "Which side shall it be?"

"To the left are fewer windows,"

said Shane. "Wait here for me, Nettar."

"No, *Gar* Shane! It is madness to go alone into such a death-trap—"

Shane's mirthless laugh rang through the darkness. "Worse madness for two. There'd be three times the noise."

"But *Gar*—"

"My mission holds less peril than you might think. But should trouble come—should I not return—I want you here, outside, to carry the word."

**SILENTLY**, then, Shane ran to the building and left along it. He swung the grapnel in a tight arc . . . sent it flying high into the air in an expert throw, over the roof of the house.

The hook landed with a flat *thunk!*

Shane hugged the shadows, listening tensely. But no sound came from within.

He tugged experimentally on the line.

The hook held.

Bracing his feet against the wall, leaning out from it, supported by the rope, the Earthman climbed swiftly upward. In half a minute he was over the coping and lying flat on his belly on the roof, drawing up the line.

The round dome of a typical *Fantasy* solarium, glowing dimly with yellowish light from some point within but below Shane's line of

vision, rose in the middle of the flat roof. Cat-like, the Earthman came to his feet and crossed to it, there to peer cautiously down through the crystal into the room below.

The solarium was empty, illuminated by only one dim lamp.

Quickly, Shane pried loose a crystal panel. Squeezing through the opening, he dropped to the floor.

A door stood half-open across the room. Noiselessly, Shane moved to it, paused and listened.

No sound came. The Earthman stepped outside, and found himself in a narrow hallway. Following it, he came to a stairway, descended cautiously.

Below, the lights were brighter, the air faintly redolent of age and cooking *palorsch*.

And, somewhere, a woman was singing softly.

Shane eased out his light-gun. Silently, he left the stairs and moved down another hallway. To the right, a door loomed. From the other side came a muffled murmur of voices.

But not the song. Cat-footed, Shane passed the portal.

The song came clearer now—a haunting, taunting melody in a tongue the Earthman did not know. The singer's voice held an alien lilt, a thread of silvery tone.

Kyrsis' voice.

It came from behind another door, and this one was open a crack.

Again Shane paused and listened. But there was no sound save the

singing.

THE Earthman stepped to the door's hinge side; threw a quick glance up and down the hall. It was still empty. Staying back of the jamb, out of sight from the room, he pressed his left hand against the door ever so gently and pushed it open—slowly, as if it were moving with a draft.

Still there was no sound but Kyrsis' voice. But after a moment it swelled a fraction, and the whisper of her footsteps crept through.

Then, of a sudden, her profile was framed between half-open door and jamb.

In two swift steps, Shane was inside—pushing her back, heeling shut the door.

The silver woman's great violet eyes went wide. She opened her mouth to scream. But before the sound could come, Shane's arm was about her. His hand clamped over her open mouth.

For an instant her body writhed against him. Her fists beat at his chest, her feet at his ankles.

He said: "If I break you, Kyrsis, the choice will be yours, not mine."

For a long moment her eyes probed his, her body still rigid, straining against him. Then, slowly, she relaxed.

Shane let her go.

Her pale, beautiful face held no expression now. With one last enigmatic glance, she turned from him and moved with perfect poise to a

mirror that hung upon another door across the room. Her slender fingers smoothed her hair, rearranged her rumpled gown.

After a moment Shane followed her, stood close behind her, so that their eyes met in the mirror. Gently, he gripped her shoulders. "I came for a reason, Kyrsis," he said.

"A reason, Shane—? She said it almost absently, her fingers still busy with her hair. "What reason?"

Shane's jaw was hard. "Perhaps you've heard that the Federation cast me out."

"Of course. It was expected." The rich purple lips curved in the faintest of mocking smiles. "Why else do you think I came to Horla with you, except to lay the ground?"

THE lines in Shane's face deepened. "I don't know. That's why I took this chance to see you now."

"What, Shane—? I do not understand . . ."

"Once, on our way here, you asked me to try to understand you and your people. You said our paths might run together if I were to take the slavers' road."

"Shane—!" Of a sudden her body again was rigid. She twisted, stared up into Shane's eyes. "You mean — you would give up the *Chonya* way? You would raid for slaves as Quos Reggar raids?"

The Earthman's lips twisted. "I'd raid—on my own terms," he an-

swered.

"On your terms—?"

"You might not care to meet them, Kyrsis."

"At least, tell me what they are."

"When the *Chonya* chieftains called me in, I took their way for mine. If I raid now, it will be because their ships are with me."

"But how—?"

Shane laugher harshly. "The Federation has turned us out, with the slaver brand upon us. If we must wear it, we'll earn it. Why should we stand by, helpless and hopeless, while both Reggar and the Federation fleet bleed us white? Better that we raid ourselves. At least, then, we'll get booty." His blue eyes gleamed. "We'll bring slaves to your people, Kyrsis—smug, fat slaves from the planets of the Federation. We'll drag them out by the thousands!"

A strange excitement seemed to seize the silver woman. "Yes, Shane, yes! We'll take your *Chonyas*—"

"There's more," Shane said.

"Yes—?"

"If you take us, you let Quos Reggar go."

She stared at him. "Are you mad, Shane?"

"No, Kyrsis; far from mad." He clenched his fist, and his face grew dark with anger. "Reggar is the dog who took away my belt. If he had his way, he'd see me with my brain rotted out with *theol*. So he is part of my price—the part that counts the most—"

"—the part that proves you are not so different from other men after all, *Gar* Shane." Kyrsis laughed softly. The things that showed in the violet eyes were very old. "For awhile I almost saw you as separate from the rest—a man apart, so hard and strong that nothing could sway you from what you saw as duty. But now . . ."—she shrugged—"You seek to save your *Chonyas*, yes. But Reggar hurt your pride when he took your belt, so now, above all, you seek for vengeance."

"And if I do?" Shane clipped. "Does it matter to you? I bring you the *Chonyas*—born raiders, a race that has carved its name in blood across the void. Beside them, what is Reggar? —A mongrel, a cross-bred *chitza* served by the scum of the spaceways." He broke off. "But you are the one who must decide. What is your answer?"

The smile left the silver woman's face. Turning, she walked thoughtfully across the room, not speaking.

After a moment, Shane followed.

AGAIN Kyrsis turned, looked up at him. Her expression was unfathomable. "You are a bold and clever man, Shane," she said. "It is a pity you can never hope to be quite clever enough."

"You mean—?"

"She means you've failed again, you *chitza*!" cut in a harsh familiar voice from the mirrored door behind Shane.

The Earthman spun about.

His great carcass draped in a *fala* cloak, Quos Reggar stood in the doorway, light-gun in hand.

Shane froze. His mouth took on a bitter twist. "I should have known you'd follow her here. But the *fala* cape—"

"It fooled you?" Reggar laughed harshly. "I thought it would. And Kyrsis did well, too, leading you over to my door, where I was sure to hear you."

Shane said nothing.

"There's someone else here for you to see," leered Reggar. He raised his voice, "Talu!"

"Here, *Sha* Reggar."

Shane caught his breath at the sound of her voice. But that was all, for then she was coming through the doorway, slim and graceful, her waist-long blue-black hair a ripple in the light, her dark *Malya* face as proudly lovely as before.

And as before, she bore a tray in her hand.

"*Sha* Shane . . ." Her voice, her face, told nothing; nor could Shane interpret the message that flickered, just for an instant, in her eyes.

Reggar said: "Once before I sent Talu to you with an injector, Earthman, and you nearly broke her arm. This time, it will be different."

Shane made no attempt to answer.

"The injector, Talu—"

Face wooden, the *Malyalara* stripped back the cloth and picked up the hypodermic from the tray. "It is ready, *Sha* Reggar."

"*Theol* was in that other injector, *starbo*, and this one holds *theol* now. It will be your second dose. Madness is just one more away."

**S**HANE stood very still. He looked from Kyrsis, with her pale ethereal beauty and silver hair and translucent skin, to Talu, the slave girl—dark, tempestuous, all *Malya*; then back to Reggar again. Instinctively, his muscles tensed.

The mongrel said: "You'll take the dose. Earthman — because if you so much as move a hair, I'll burn your arms off!" The light-gun in his webbed hand was rock-steady.

"Talu—"

"Yes. *Sha* Reggar." Quickly, efficiently, she stepped to the Earthman's side. "Twist your neck, *Sha* Shane."

"Twist it!" echoed Reggar. His huge lobed eyes were flecked with red.

Teeth clenched, eyes hot with hate, Shane obeyed.

The *Malyalara* pressed the plunger.

Reggar let out a breath, stepped back. "Tomorrow, great *gar*, you get the last," he gloated. "Then, after that, you'll serve with my fleet . . . serve gladly, happy to help us in every way, just for the sake of another shot of *theol*." He chuckled ghoulishly. "It will be a fitting fate —the more so after the way you've tried so many schemes to split *Sha* Kyrsis from me, so that you could dispose of each of us alone. In

fact—”

Somewhere, some living creature screamed. There was horror in the sound—a hideous note, as if soul were being torn from body.

Reggar froze. “What—?”

From the hallway came the faintest whisper of footsteps.

The mongrel's light-gun prodded Shane. “You, *chitza* — open the door!”

Wordless, Shane crossed the room. He gripped the handle, pulled back the door. Outside, the hall had gone black, lights out.

Instantly, before he could so much as draw a breath, dark hands came out of nowhere; seized him, jerked him half into the hall. A knife-point pricked his belly.

“Move and die, Earthman!” a voice breathed in his ear—a man's voice, cold, and hard, and heavy with a *Malya* accent.

Shane stood as if carved from stone.

From the room behind him, now, came another fierce *Malya* voice: “The light-gun, Reggar!”

For an instant silence echoed. Then Reggar cursed, and there was the thud of the pistol hitting the floor.

**N**OW the *Malyas* holding Shane shoved him back into the room. There, another *Malya*—a hard-bitten, swaggering little man—already had Reggar pressed back against the wall, penned there by a knife like the one digging into Shane's belly.

Other dark, cold-eyed fighting men stood by the mirrored door to the huge hybrid's quarters.

Talu was with them, her face aglow with fierce joy. “*Malyas, Malyas—!*”

The silver woman, Kyrsis, stood silent and apart. But shadows of strain showed in the lines and hollows of her face.

“We have done our work well,” the leader of the dark men said. “We have the Earthman, Shane. We have Reggar, the mongrel. We have the silver woman. There'll be joy and feasting at Amara when we ramp our ships.”

“You are of Amara, *Malya*?” Shane asked.

The other's dark eyes gleamed. “We are of Amara, Earthman—and before you die, you'll wish you'd never heard of us or our asteroid! Other races may let the slavers raid and not strike back. But we claim blood for blood—”

Shane said: “I am *gar* of the *Chonyas*, not a slaver. Ask Talu, the slave girl. She is of your people—”

“Who takes the word of a captive woman?” The *Malya* laughed thinly. “We *Malyas* have raided for slaves ourselves, in our day. A woman's heart goes with her man, not her race.”

“Check with others, then—”

“We have checked already. The word is out: you raid with Reggar. You came to Horla with the woman, Kyrsis. It is enough!” Fierce lights

gleamed in the *Malya's* eyes. He grinned—a savage, death's-head grimace. "We've tracked you down across the void, you three, and now we'll see you pay for the *Malya* blood you've spilt — battling the *zanth*s for your lives in Amara's great arena!"

## CHAPTER IX

**T**HIS was Amara's great arena. The oval pit was full twenty feet deep and floored with sand . . . sand that here and there was churned and trodden, stained dark brown with men's life blood.

Above the pit, seats rose into the star-flecked night in steep-banked tiers.

Those seats were full, now—packed from pit to rim with the savage, dark-faced *Malya* breed, a blood-lusting horde whose cries for slaughter rose in great, swelling waves like the screams of primeval beasts.

In the forefront, ringing the rim of the pit, sat the *Malya* chieftan and his court—the old raiders, the men of power, the warriors and their women.

And there, too, sat another woman, a slim, lovely *Malyalara*, placed close beside the chief himself.

Talu.

Slave girl no longer, she now wore a gown of richest *kalor*. Jeweled clips held the rippling, blue-black hair, and a jewel-studded harness accented her shoulders' softness, her throat's clean curve, the bare breasts'

proud, firm swell.

Ankle-deep in the sand of the pit, Shane surveyed them, one and all.

Now the *Malya* chief leaned forward across the rim, a long fighting knife in his hand. His deep-set eyes gleamed anticipation. "You are the first, Earthman . . . you and this knife against a *zanth*!"

Boldly, Shane met the chieftain's stare. "And if I win—?"

For the fraction of a second a sort of dull, throbbing silence seemed to fall over the crowd. Then it broke in a gale of wild, tumultuous laughter, echoing and re-echoing upward to the stars.

"If you win—?" the *Malya* chieftain choked. "Have you stayed too long in the sun of Mercury, *chitza*? No man has ever come out of the pit over a *zanth*."

"What holds for other men is not for me. I asked: what if I win?"

**A**DMIRATION showed in the *Malya's* dark face. "If you fight as boldly as you talk—small wonder that the *Chonyas* made you *gar*!" And then: "If you win, you'll live—but here, on Amara, forever a slave."

"I ask no more," Shane came back coldly. Again his blue eyes swept the crowd, the sparkling night of a thousand stars. For a moment his gaze lingered on Talu, catching the fever in her eyes, the tension carved in every line. The noise of the shouting horde above beat down upon him. The fetid stench of the

*zanth* came to his nostrils from the tunnel-chute.

"Your weapon, Earthman!" cried the *Malya* chief, and threw it down. "Keeper, prepare to loose the *zanth*!"

In one swift motion, Shane swept up the knife. Then, quickly, he moved to the shadows along the wall of the pit, out of the smoky torches' flickering glare.

In the tunnel, the *zanth* roared thunderously. Shane caught a glimpse of the panic on Kyrsis' pale face, where she sat in the prisoners' cage; of the fear that crawled in Quos Reggar's great lobed eyes.

Overhead, the *Malya* chieftain cried, "Turn loose the *zanth*!"

The heavy-grilled gate at the tunnel mouth swung up. In the blackness beyond, the *zanth*'s eyes burned like coals of fire. Again it roared, and then again. Then, slowly, it came forward, out into the pit, there to stand for a moment, blinking against the glare.

Shane sucked in air. This *zanth* was big, bigger than any he had ever seen . . . well over twenty feet. The murderous, serrated tail alone measured at least seven, and the great jaws were of a size to snap a man in two in a single bite. Its scales were big as dinner plates, and as thick, horny with age. Spurs and claws gleamed in the torchlight like curved knives.

Then the great, ringed nostrils flared as the creature scented Shane. The spiked diamond head came

round, twisting and turning on the monstrous, snake-like neck; darting and probing to the full five feet of its length. The stink of its breath swept over the Earthman in a nauseous wave.

Shane stood very still.

But already the *zanth* was turning. The bulging eyes gleamed redly, searching for him.

The knife-hilt was slippery in Shane's hand. A rill of sweat crept down his spine.

The *zanth* paused now, the spiked head moving sinuously to and fro. The tail flicked the blood-stained sand. Its powerful, armor-scaled body seemed to draw together.

Shane forgot to breathe.

The *zanth* lunged.

**S**HANE dived as the great spiked head lanced forward. The jaws snapped shut where he had been with a clacking like the sound of monstrous castinets.

After that, there was no time for anything but action.

For even before the Earthman hit the ground, the thing was whirling. The claws of its eight feet sprayed the sand like a windstorm. Again, it lunged.

Desperately, Shane rolled out of the way.

But now the serrated, seven-foot tail lashed out at him, with a force that would have smashed through a solid brick wall.

Again Shane rolled—in, towards the *zanth*'s body.

One of the feet clawed for him. A six-inch talon raked a bloody path along his side.

Panting, the Earthman scrambled away—back to the shadows, the wall of the pit.

The *zanth* whirled; charged.

Taut-muscled, Shane waited till the diamond head hammered forward. Then, in the last instant, he leaped aside.

The *zanth's* head smashed against the wall of the pit. Savagely, Shane stabbed for the crevice where the jaw-plates met, trying for the creature's tiny brain.

But the tough cartilage turned away the blade. With a roar, the *zanth* struck at him.

Shane leaped high into the air, and the awful head passed beneath him. Twisting, he landed on the writhing, tree-thick neck; balanced there for a precarious moment.

The *zanth* reared back, clawing for him, and Shane sprang clear. Again he took up his stand against the wall.

This time, the *zanth* broke off its charge to flail at him with its tail. Barely in time, the Earthman got out of the way. He was breathing hard, now—his whole body shaking under the strain.

The *zanth* lunged.

Desperately, Shane snatched up a handful of sand, hurled it straight into the oncoming monster's glaring eyes.

The creature came up short, shaking its head.

Shane moved like a striking *quirst*. Again he snatched sand, hurled it.

**T**HE *zanth* raised its head high, to the full length of the five-foot neck. Clawing, it leaped at the Earthman. The awful talons shredded his clothes, tore at his flesh.

Shane threw himself sideways.

The head lanced towards him.

He slashed at the eyes with his knife, felt the steel bite in.

A wild roar burst from the creature's throat. It threw itself at Shane in a frenzy, clawing and snapping and threshing.

Once more, Shane sprang aside—then darted back before the creature could make the double turn. Leaping to its neck, he threw himself flat upon it, clinging to it with legs and one arm as to a writhing log, while with the other hand, the knife hand, he stabbed again and again at the bulging eyes.

The *zanth* roared its agony. Twisting and jerking, it struggled to unseat the Earthman. One clawed foot reached his leg; laid it open. But still Shane clung to his place, slashing and stabbing.

Blindly, the monster crashed against the pit's wall. It reared, then surged forward, clawing its way up the sheer face. The great spiky head rocked and swayed; beat against the stonework in a spasm of pain, less than three feet below the rim.

A fierce light flamed in Shane's eyes. Clutching the base of the

spike, he suddenly let go the *zanth's* neck with his legs. His toes dug into the overlap between the scales, and all at once he was running upward—up the snake-neck, onto the diamond head itself.

And then, before the *Malyas* realized what was happening, he leaped from the head to the rim of the pit. The fighting knife flashed in a savage arc. A warrior's shout choked off in a rush of blood. The others about him scrambled back from the slashing blade.

Behind Shane, back in the pit, the *zanth* screamed and hurled itself upward. Its head came over the rim. With a mighty, surging leap, its forefeet followed. A terrible roar burst from its throat as it caught the scent of the *Malya* warrior's blood, and it clawed its way onward, upward, out of the pit and into the rising tiers of seats.

**I**T was a nightmare, a world gone mad. Wildly, the screaming *Malyas* fled. But the *zanth's* great tail lashed out and a score of them fell, crushed or smashed into the pit. The knife-claws tore; the great jaws ran ruby-red with blood.

Forgotten, Shane followed the panicked mob.

Only then, somehow, a voice slashed through to him through the tumult: "Shane—Shane!"

He whirled.

Talu was running towards him, across the seats. "This way!"

For an instant he hesitated, then

changed his course to meet hers.

She caught his hand. "This way!"

Together, they raced back towards the chief's box at the rim of the pit, and now Shane saw that a trap door in the floor had been lifted.

"Hurry!" cried the *Malyalara*. "In a moment the warriors will bring in a proton cannon to kill the *zanth*, and someone will think of you, too. You must be gone before then!"

Shane shot one look at the pitch-black shaft. "Where does it go?"

"To a passage below the arena that leads to the chief's castle and the ramps. We can steal a flyer there. But hurry!"

Shane shot one quick look back.

The *zanth* still raged and ravened through the crowd, but already the warriors had rallied to hem it in.

Tightly, he said to Talu: "You first, then."

"First?"

"Do you think I'd let you get behind me?" he clipped bitterly. "Fool that I am, I'll go with you, because I have no choice. But my knife will be in your back every step of the way, ready for your next betrayal."

"Betrayal?" she repeated, and now the heat of anger was in her voice, her eyes. "Did you say betrayal, Earthman?"

"What would you call it?" He made no effort to keep the fury from his tone. "Who tripped me when I would have stabbed Quos

Reggar? Who shot a second dose of *theol* into my veins?"

She drew away from him, then, and the look she threw stung like a whip. "Come, *Sha Shane*. If that is your belief, then I must indeed go first." Litely, she lowered herself over the edge of the shaft and disappeared down a metal ladder set in one wall.

**K**NIFE still in hand, Shane followed. The effort made him shake, and under the strain of climbing, the claw-wound in his side began to bleed again.

Then, at last, they were in the murky passageway below, and Talu was leading him swiftly through the darkness. Once Shane staggered and would have fallen, had not the *Malyalara* caught him; and once he dropped the knife. But she picked it up again, and her groping hand strayed into the blood as she sought to return the weapon. So she made him sit down while she tore up some garment and bandaged his wounds, and her fingers were very gentle.

They went on again, then, for what seemed endless miles, till at last they came to a huge, dim-lighted ramping-spot where dull black *Malya* flyers stood in ordered rows, their bubbles pointed up into the starlit sky. And finally they even found one with its lower hatches open, and the girl helped Shane to climb aboard. She strapped him in the pilot's seat, and herself in the other seat beside him.

For a long time, it seemed, he worked at the controls with clumsy fingers, till at last, somehow, they were blasting off, roaring up and up and up into the gaudy heavens. And Talu talked to him, and braced him, and helped him hold the jet-globe steady, while seconds, or maybe hours, ticked by.

Only then, suddenly, the sky about them was full of ships, great black-hulled ships that were built for ranging clear across the void. They came in hundreds—thousands, maybe—blazing in thunderous silence through the blackness of spatial night. And one of the ships swerved and came alongside the little *Malya* flyer, and a great hatch opened in its side and sucked them in.

Then the hatch slid closed again, and the darkness about them was complete. Even their jets were blacked out, killed by the great ship's pickup neutralizers.

And still Shane sat in silence, staring stupidly straight ahead.

But the body of the girl, Talu, came warm against him in the ebon murk, her voice a fierce, husky whisper in his ear: "You must believe me, *Shane*! I did not betray you—not ever! The things I did, I had to do, in order to live to pay back the blood debt of my people. You could never have killed Quos Reggar with one thrust, no matter where, for he is a cross-bred mongrel, and his body does not work as ours do."

Shane forced out words: "Why tell me now? Why care about it?"

"Why? Why?" The girl's voice held a tremor now, a fear not even the black could hide. "I tell you so that you will know, and not die hating me to your last breath. That I could not stand! For die we will, and soon—because this ship is one of Reggar's slavers!"

## CHAPTER X

**H**ERE IS Life!" the vendor cried. "Fresh life from new planets! Young slaves, with the hot blood surging through their veins! And all yours—yours for the asking, going for the price you set yourselves!" He struck a note on a silver gong. "Look at this next wench—a warm and vibrant thing, my friends, throbbing with life and spirit! What am I offered for her?"

The woman on the block was Venusian, a weary, fading creature with the sucking tube and ear-stalks of the *Transmi*. Her eyes were veined with weeping, her sagging face shadowed with fear and fatigue.

"Come! Make the first bid!" cried the vendor. "Who'll start it? Do I hear five hundred?"

"Fifty," called a voice from the rear of the crowd.

"Fifty! Do you seek to insult me? She's worth five hundred if she is a *xi*—"

"You mean, you insult us, vendor," the bidder retorted caustically.

"A fool can see that the life runs low within her. She would not last the night."

"Fifty!" cried the vendor. "I'm offered fifty, friends. Who'll raise it to sixty?"

No one spoke. After a moment, the vendor struck the silver gong again. "Sold to Callan at fifty!" He pushed the Venusian down the steps. "Get on with you, woman . . ."

An attendant pushed Shane forward, heavy with irons. "An Earthman, vendor—"

The vendor struck the gong. "An Earthman, my friends; a fighting man — powerful, surging with life in spite of his wounds. Who'll start it—?"

Coldly, Shane swept the auction room with his glance.

Here, in front, on one side, were the slaves—a motley assortment, dragged to this final degradation from a dozen far-flung planets. One by one, they were thrust upon the block, exposed to the ghoulish appraisal of the crowd that filled the room.

The crowd. A crowd of silver men and women, with gleaming hair and violet eyes and pale, translucent skins. A hundred hungry-eyed, avid brothers and sisters of *Shi Kyrsis*.

**E**VEN the room itself was strange. The materials resembled nothing known anywhere in all the void. The lush decor followed an alien theme.

"This man is good for long-time use!" exhorted the vendor. "See the strength of him—the fire and vigor! You cannot pass him by . . ."

A door to Shane's right opened. A woman came in, a silver woman.

*The woman.*

Kyrsis.

An old man close to the block called eagerly, "I'll give a hundred, vendor!" in a thin, cracking voice.

"A hundred I'm offered! Now who'll make it a hundred and fifty? No one can afford to let this strong man go at a mere hundred—"

"Hundred and ten!" someone shouted.

Kyrsis turned. For the first time, her eyes met Shane's, and she stopped suddenly, staring as if paralyzed.

"Hundred twenty!"

"Hundred thirty!"

"Do I hear a hundred forty? Surely no fine, strapping fighting man can go for less—"

"Two hundred," Kyrsis said.

"Two hundred! The Lady Kyrsis bids two hundred—"

"Two fifty, vendor!" cried the old man by the block.

"Three hundred," came back Kyrsis.

"Do I hear three fifty—?"

"With his wounds, he is worth no more than three," the old man mumbled.

"Three twenty-five then! Do I hear three twenty-five?"

"Three ten—"

"Three fifty," echoed Kyrsis.

The vendor paused and looked about. "Three fifty is bid . . ." He struck the gong. "Sold to the Lady Kyrsis for three fifty."

Shane left the block, strode to the silver woman's side; and for a moment they stood there in vibrant silence, alone in the crowd, duelling with their eyes.

Then Kyrsis asked: "What dark fate brought you here, *Gar* Shane? When I last saw you, you were hewing a path through the *Malya* horde at the arena . . ."

"And you were in the prisoners' cage." The Earthman ignored the strange tremor in the silver woman's voice. His words were clipped. "Talu and I escaped and fled Amara in a flyer. But one of Quos Reggar's slavers sucked us in and brought us here."

"The slavers came to rescue Reggar," Kyrsis said. "They swept Amara clean." She looked down, breathing deep as if to still some inner tension. And then: "Talu was with you? They brought her here—?"

"—and put her aside. Her hair was cropped, so they knew she already had a master." Shane laughed harshly. "Me—I'd worn no yoke, so they sent me to the block."

"Then . . . let us go. I have already done my other buying." The tremor in Kyrsis' voice was stronger, now—a sort of undercurrent of strange excitement.

"Your 'other buying'—?"

"A few young slaves to . . . to train for household use." The silver woman's fingers trembled, cold as ice, upon Shane's arm. "Come! Let us go now—quickly—"

SHE led Shane out, through other rooms, where other vendors hawked their wares, and other slaves stood shamed or sobbing, bared to the eager, weirdly-lusting eyes of the silver people.

Then they reached a sort of transit station, and an attendant brought a car of a type Shane had never seen before, and they got in.

Three frightened children, a *Malya* boy of perhaps twelve and two *Chonya* girls even younger, huddled at the back, their dark eyes big with panic.

"Your slaves, Lady Kyrsis?" Shane asked coldly. The barb in his voice would have slashed through the scales of a *zanth*.

The silver woman kept her eyes on the controls. The car hurtled off through a tube-like passage. She did not answer.

Then the car halted. They got out—Shane, Kyrsis, children—and entered rooms, rooms luxuriously furnished in the alien style of the silver people.

"And now?" Shane inquired thinly.

Kyrsis' breathing was fast and shallow, her face even more pale than before. She spoke too rapidly, in a ragged, uneven voice. "You are weary. Shane so weary.

You must rest now. Here—let me take off your shackles. There is a room here you will like—a quiet room . . ."

She unlocked the cuffs on his wrists and tossed them aside, then led him swiftly to an adjoining sleep chamber. Foam-soft cushioning a foot thick blanketed a dais along one wall, big enough for a dozen men. A lingering perfume filled the air. Soft lights cast a silvery glow. From somewhere came faint strains of elfin music.

"Rest here, Earthman," the silver woman said softly. "Rest until I call you . . ."

For a moment her icy fingers touched his cheek. Then she left the room, closing the door behind her.

Shane stared after her, a frown furrowing his brow. After a moment, he stepped to the door, tried the handle.

It was locked.

SHANE'S frown deepened. He rubbed a grimy hand across his cheek where the cold of Kyrsis' fingers still lingered; finally turned to a more thorough inspection of his quarters.

As he pivoted, light glinted on the glass-like surface of the wall that flanked the door-caught a vague flicker of movement.

Shane moved on across the chamber with no sign that he had seen it.

An alcove held a radiation bath.

The Earthman stepped into the cubicle and flipped the switch, luxuriating under the warm tingle of the molecular bombardment. Slowly, the sweat and dirt and grime faded from his body, the dried blood washed away. The worst of the weariness left his muscles. His bones almost stopped aching.

Refreshed, he snapped off the radiation and, leaving the cubicle, drank greedily from a crystal bubbler set beside it.

Now he went back to the sleeping chamber. His eyes flickered over the spot in the wall beside the door.

The surface showed blank and dead as the rest.

Shane grinned sourly to himself; crossed the room and tried the door once more.

It was still locked.

The Earthman hesitated. Then, grimly, he braced one foot on the casing beside the lock, gripped the handle, and threw his full weight on it.

Inside the lock, something snapped. The handle twisted askew.

Again Shane tugged, his muscles swelling with the strain.

The broken handle pulled from its socket. Inserting a forefinger in the hole, Shane manipulated the lock, pulled back the bolt.

The door swung open.

Shane stepped outside. He glanced at the wall behind the spot where he had seen the movement.

A PICTURE hung there. Lifting it aside, he found a small,

hinged panel. Opening it, he discovered that a lens set behind the shiny coating of the inner wall enabled him to survey the entire sleep-chamber.

Again, the sour grin twisted Shane's lips. Swiftly, he strode through the silence, checking the other rooms. He found them empty, all but one. Its door was locked.

The Earthman drew back a moment.

A picture hung a few feet to one side of the locked door.

Shane stepped over to it and lifted it from the wall.

It concealed another peep hole. Shading his eyes, the Earthman peered through the lens.

Kyrsis was within . . . Kyrsis and one of the captive *Chonya* girls.

The silver woman held the child upon her lap. She was talking to her—smiling, squeezing the chubby hands. Her manner was gentle, tender.

Yet under it all, somehow, hung a weird, unholy note—grotesque, obscene.

Some of the fear had left the child's eyes now. She smiled wanly . . . nestled, not quite so tense, in the silver woman's arms.

Kyrsis' eyes closed. Her lips parted, and Shane knew that she was singing as she rocked the child.

The child's lips drooped. Trustingly, the small arms half-embraced the silver woman. The tired head rested on Kyrsis' breast.

The child slept.

Now new emotions came to Kyrsis' lovely face . . . strange passion—a horrid anticipatory glow. Her nostrils flared. Her violet eyes grew large, gleamed with fires older than time itself. She cradled the child. Ever so tenderly, yet with a terrible air of strain, her parted lips sought the girl's.

Shane stood frozen, breathing hard, tight in indecision's grip.

The child moved languidly in Kyrsis' arms — restless, not struggling, and for a moment the silver woman straightened, sucked in air. Then, again, she pressed her lips against the girl's.

Shane cursed beneath his breath and turned towards the door.

But even as he did so, Kyrsis rose, the child still in her arms. The silver woman's face was serene now, ethereally beautiful, unmarred by any trace of strain. Gently, she laid down the still form of the child. Then, coming erect again, she moved towards the door.

Shane slid the picture back into place and stepped out of sight in the adjoining room.

**T**HE door to the room in which Kyrsis had been, opened and closed. The silver woman passed down the hall, out of sight.

Tense, silent, Shane made for the room from which she'd come.

The door was unlocked now. Swiftly, he slipped inside and stepped to the couch where the *Chonya* child still lay, so very still. He

touched the soft hand. Lifted it with trembling fingers.

Behind him, the door-latch clicked. Shane turned.

Kyrsis stood watching him. "You come unannounced, Earthman," she murmured coolly.

"I came in as you left," Shane said, and of a sudden his hands, his voice, his whole body, were shaking uncontrollably, gripped in a paroxysm of surging fury. "I saw you here, with the child! Do you hear me? I saw you!"

"So . . . ?" Kyrsis' face was still calm, the violet eyes unfathomable.

The veins at Shane's temples stood out, throbbing. With a tremendous effort, he brought his voice under a semblance of control.

He said: "This child is dead!"

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HEY stood there thus for a long, taut, echoing moment.

Then Kyrsis said: "You leave me no choice, Earthman. I see I must tell you Gadar's secret."

"Gadar—?"

Her lips twitched. "Yes, Earthman. Gadar, the dark star—the star hurled into your solar system from across the void: cold, bleak, barren, uninhabited Gadar."

"You mean that you—your people—are of Gadar?"

The silver woman nodded. "Yes. When our star cooled, in the course of that endless voyage across the void, we had no choice but to bur-

row deeper and deeper, like animals—cutting ourselves away from the awful cold of outer space, hunting desperately for the last dim vestiges of warmth at our planet's core. Then, when at last we had come into the family of your sun, we saw no reason to let it be known that we existed. For we knew the thing we had to do if we were still to live, and we knew that if you knew it, Gadar would be doomed."

"Then—this is Gadar? We are inside it now—deep down below the surface?"

"So deep that even the echographs of your Federation's exploration parties did not find us. Here, for a million years, we have built our civilization." A new glint came to the woman's violet eyes, a note of excitement to her voice. "The things we have done, Shane! The incredible things! You will never believe them until you see them. We have conquered time and space and matter—"

"And the child is dead," Shane said.

"The child—" Kyrsis broke off, and a shadow crossed her face. "Yes, the child is dead."

**UNSPEAKING**, the Earthman waited. His temple veins no longer throbbed, but his jaw was hewn of granite.

Kyrsis said: "There are so many things your childish science knows that are not true—and one of them is the nature of life."

Shane studied her, narrow-eyed. "So? In what way?"

"You think that life comes into being when certain conditions are correct. But we know otherwise."

"I hear only words, not meaning," Shane clipped coldly.

"Of course. Because the whole pattern of your thinking is based on false assumptions." The silver woman groped for words. "The thing I seek to say, too simply, is that life is not a creature of conditions. It is an entity, a basic element, a product of the whole great cosmic process of creation. Either it exists in a place, or it does not." She shrugged. "Your solar system has it."

"And Gadar—?"

"Gadar had it once, ten million years ago. But life is like any other resource. You use it up. It dissipates and scatters, transmuted into useless forms by a process that not even our science can reverse." Her voice fell. "Then, Shane, your planet dies."

Shane stared at her. "So you bought slaves—"

"Of course we bought slaves!" A note of hysteria crept into the silver woman's laugh. "Power, you talked about. Why would anyone buy slaves in a universe where power is free? What we sought was life—life in a form we could drink up, before our bodies finally died!" She came close to Shane, her pale face smooth and glowing, the violet eyes afire. "Look at me, Earth-

man! Look closely! How old would you guess me? How many of your Earth years?"

Shane did not speak.

"A hundred years, Earthman? A thousand? Ten thousand? A hundred thousand?" Again she laughed—wildly, up and down the scale. And then, steady once more: "Shane, I first drew breath a million years ago! Our science has kept me as I am—young in body and mind and heart. But without new life—without the living slaves we buy—I would wither and die in months. This child,"—and she gestured to the limp, dead body of the *Chonya* girl—"what did she know of life? What did she care? I played with her, and comforted her, and she was happy; and then I sucked the life out of her body, and you hate me for it. But was it so wicked, really? Was it not better that I should live, I who have learned to love life through a million endless year, than she, who would have wasted that life and thrown it away in some dull corner of the asteroid belt?"

**S**HANE shifted; stared down at the dead child for a long, long moment, then back at the woman again.

"You are thinking, 'Is there no other way?'" Kyrsis whispered. Her pale hand touched the Earthman's arm. "I tell you, Shane: there is none. How many years have our scientists sought it? How many

eons of spatial time? But always, the answer is no. We must have life itself—humanoid life, like that of this girl here. No other can be transmuted to our bodies."

"If life is an element, as you say, a thing that wells up with creation, out of the birth of a planet, then you could have moved to another planet," Shane said in a dull, flat voice. "If life is gone from Gadar, then you could have migrated, picked a new home."

"It sounds so easy, does it not?" the silver woman taunted. "But where life exists, there life forms evolve. We could have taken such a planet only by conquest. Would your worlds have liked that, Shane? Would they have been willing to see us come in and seize their homelands? You fought out of pride, for the belt the *Chonya* chieftains gave you. Would the worlds of your system do less if we tried to invade them?"

Shane stood mute.

Kyrsis' arm slipped about him. The rich purple lips came close to his. "Come with us, Shane! Join us!" she whispered. "For a million aching years I have sought a man like you. Do not leave me, now that I've found you . . ."

A weakness crept through Shane's body.

With a tremendous, savage effort, he hurled the silver woman from him.

"You'd steal my life as Quos Reggar stole my belt!" he shouted.

Stark murder was in his eyes.

"No, Shane—! No!"

"Words!" the Earthman lashed fiercely. "Words, to lull me as you lulled that *Chonya* child!" He caught Kyrsis' arm, dragged her up from the place where she had fallen. "You talk of life as if you, your people, were the only ones who knew the way to live it. But life belongs to each man, alone—his precious own, to waste or hoard as he sees fit—"

The woman asked: "And what will you do, now that you have decided?"

"Decided—?"

**T**HE look she threw him was a study in contempt. "I can see it in your eyes, Earthman. For a moment you hung, unsure, caught up by the vision of the wealth and power that might be yours; of me at your side, and endless years for us together. But then it dawned upon you of a sudden that I might suck your life out, as we suck those of the other slaves we take, though such was not my plan. The thought brought fear, and in the same instant you became the great *Gor* Shane, who would strike down Gadar and save your solar system." She laughed, and the sound was chill as outer space. "You are as much a child as that dead lump there beside you. Do you think to pit yourself against my people—scientists who could plot your every thought ten million years before

your birth? You are but a fool, and you will die as all the others have died, and Quos Reggar will wear your belt and serve us!"

"There comes a time for every man to die," Shane said. "If this is mine, I'll face it." He picked a heavy, club-like, metal ornament from a table, and his face had the rugged lines of carven stone. "We go now, Kyrsis. And if I can die—remember, so can you!"

"But where—?"

Shane bared his teeth in a death's-head grin. "To your ramps, *Shi* Kyrsis. Even slavers carry a fleet alarm."

"A fleet alarm—?"

"When a space ship wallows through the void, out of control, a crewman throws the switch on the fleet alarm box. It sends out a distress call on a Federation beam—a call so strong that it can reach to the farthest star."

"And then—?"

"The fleet command sends aid." The Earthman laughed thinly. "They send a patrol most often, or even a single ship. But when they get a call straight out of the core of Gadar, they'll waste no time on mere patrols or squadrons. There'll be a fleet, the whole great Federation fleet, sweeping down upon your planet."

"Indeed?" the woman mocked. "So your Federation's fleet will come. What can they do to us, burrowed here deep within the solid rock of Gadar? And we have

weapons, Earthman—weapons the like of which you've never seen."

"Then roll them out," Shane said. "This will be your chance to use them." He pushed her through the doorway; on past the other rooms and out into the car.

She asked, "What can you do if I will not aid you?"

Shane shrugged. "I'd have no choice but to go my way alone, I suppose . . ." —and then, sinking in the barb with a savage twist—"after I'd beaten your brains out, killed you so dead that not even your people's science could ever put you back together!"

THEY traveled through endless miles of tube-like passage, after that, but always climbing ever upward—the silver woman sitting at the controls, Shane watching, hawk-like, alert in every nerve and fiber, the heavy club gripped ready in his hand.

Then, finally, they reached a place where great volcanic pipes led upward, and slaver space ships towed base-down, ramped and ready.

There was a guard, a silver guard, who said, "It is forbidden to go farther."

"Of course," Shane said—and smiled and struck him down.

"Must I go further?" Kyrsis asked. Panic was in her voice.

"Much further," Shane replied. Again he threw her the death's-head grin. "Life is a sacred thing, you've said, and I am a fool—fool enough,

at least, to think it should be true for my *Chonyas*, as well as your people. So drive on—out along the ramp to where Quos Reggar's own great ship is waiting!"

"Not Reggar's own ship—!" The silver woman's lips were trembling. "Earthman, he may be on board now. He brought me back to Gadar with him, and—"

"—and if he's here, so much the better!" The recklessness was back in Shane's stance now. The blue eyes gleamed a chill excitement. "Why do you think I seek his ship, except to find him? He is the key to this bath of blood; were it not for him and his kind, your people might have been hard-put to implement their plans for slaughter. Fool that I am, lacking your skill and science, I've a feeling that if I can cut Quos Reggar's throat, I'll have traveled far towards choking off this madness!" He lifted his club. "Drive on, *Shi Kyrsis!* Quickly, before the vision of that dead *Chonya* child again seeps through me!"

Trembling, the silver woman worked at the controls. The car went racing down the ramp to where Quos Reggar's ship stood waiting.

"Inside!" Shane said. "Keep close before me!"

They clambered aboard the slaver, tight with tension. But there was no sign of life. Reggar's own quarters lay deserted.

"The control room, then," the Earthman said tightly.

In silence, they climbed the long steel ladder.

A lone *Pervod* sat in the control room, rewiring a panel. He looked up, saw Kyrsis already in the doorway. Lust touched his sly reptilian face. "Ho, woman—!"

Shane smashed his skull.

And there was the black metal cube that was the fleet alarm box.

"You spoke of weapons, Kyrsis?" Shane said bleakly. "Now is the time, then. Roll them out!"

He threw the switch.

## CHAPTER XII

**T**HEY were coming now—a horde of great silver ships that lanced through the void like streaks of light, hurtling down on Gadar. The slim, sleek *Chonyas* craft were with them, too . . . the dull black *Malya* flyers; and Shane knew that his other calls had gotten through—that the worlds and the asteroids were uniting against slavery and death and chaos.

A siren blasted shrill alarm. Quos Reggar's renegades swarmed onto the ramp, racing for their ships to take up the challenge.

The light of battle shone in Shane's blue eyes. The reckless laugh rose in his throat. With a jerk, he levered the slaver flagship's great hatches shut. His thumb rammed home the contact button for the interlacing belts of proton cannon that girded the craft.

The exploding flame of pronic

blasts erupted across the short-range visiscreen's whole viewer—searing the outlaws from the ramp, smashing the slaver ships off their bases, turning the great volcanic pits to a holocaust of flaming ruin.

And Shane the Earthman, *gar* of the *Chonyas*, high lord of the asteroids, laughed his wild, bold, reckless laugh and jammed the contact button home again . . . again . . . again . . .

But now a voice came through the amplifier—Quos Reggar's voice, shaking with rage and hate and fury: "Though it costs me my own ship, I'll blast you, *chitza!* You'll sear as my men have seared—"

Shane flicked the switch. "Blast, then, Reggar! Blast—but you'll blast the Lady Kyrsis with me!"

Beside him, Kyrsis screamed, "No Reggar! Not that—not that! The meteors—"

Shane snapped the switch. "The meteors—?"

The silver woman's poise was gone. She shook her fist, and the glittering metallic hair came tumbling down about her shoulders. "You'll see, Earthman! You'll see! We have weapons such as you've never dreamed of—"

**S**HANE'S eyes flicked back to the long-range visiscreen—to the silver fleet that raced towards Gadar. It was closer now . . . so close he could see the fore-jets opening for the landing.

Only then, abruptly, the fleet was

swerving—swinging wide in wild, irregular maneuver.

And then the meteors came—bright balls of flame in swirling clouds and clusters, with cores of stone and molten iron; flashing across the screen in the path of the Federation fleet . . . hurtling through space in a murderous barrage.

And one ship swerved too late, and a great orange-and-purple monster crashed into it with a burst of fire and sparking shards.

"You talk of power, Earthman?" Kyrsis raged shrilly. "You brag of your Federation's broadcast system? Then look at this, and know what power really means! We have tapped a source of energy so great it makes all others puny—a source your science left untouched, though it lies within your solar system! But we have harnessed that force. We have concentrated it into great controlled magnetic fields that we can shift at will, so strong they pull the very meteors from their courses and hurl them to the place that we desire them!"

Shane rocked, and shock was suddenly written on his lean, hard face. Wordless, he stared into the screen.

"And there is more, *Gar* Shane—much more!" the woman cried. Swiftly, she stepped to the screen and twirled the dials. "There was a plan we drew for such a time as this — a plan to smash barbarian worlds to dust and ashes. We'll hurl the meteor swarms down on their cities, clouds of them so huge they'll

cut through any atmospheric layer." She whirled. "Here, see your homeland, Earth! It will be the first to go! Already, the field is concentrating, forming— drawing in the meteor clouds out of the void—"

The viewer on the long-range screen was clearing. And there was Earth, Shane's native planet, a great, green-glowing arc in the lower corner. A lone space-ship was rising in the foreground, speeding out into the void. But already, about it, were meteor clusters . . . gathering swarms that grew with every passing minute.

"You see, *Gar* Shane? The people of your Earth are doomed!" the silver woman jeered in paranoiac frenzy. "There is no hope, no way to save them! The other planets, too, will go, till at last there is no one left but we of Gadar. Then we shall migrate out of this dark star, into your worlds, where life is not yet spent and faded. My people's strength will rise anew—"

**B**LEAKLY, Shane stared into the screen, through a moment that lasted all eternity.

Then, in one explosive motion, he snatched the space-phones from their rack. His voice crackled out into the void: "*Chonyas . . . Chonyas . . .* Shane, your *gar*, is calling—"

And taut-drawn *Chonya* words came back: "We stand by for your orders—"

"I want a ship," Shane answered

tightly, "a single fast *Chonya* ship, equipped with Abaquist repellers, to try to break through the meteor swarm and come down to Gadar to me on the fleet alarm beam."

"We come, *Gar* Shane—"

Even with the words, a slim, sleek craft was breaking from the milling fleet, swerving through the sky in a monstrous arc.

Then it was coming round again—striking its course, plunging down on Gadar. Straight into the blazing meteor swarm it sped, and even on the screen Shane could see it tossing — careening, staggering, lurching with shock.

And then it was through the swarm and out again. Its hull was ripped, its hatches battered, but still it plummeted down towards Gadar.

Kyrsis cried: "Now I know you are truly mad, not just a fool, if you think you can fight both my people and Quos Reggar here on Gadar with the crew of a single ship!"

Shane said: "We're leaving now," and levered back the hatches. Again he fired a burst from the proton cannon to clear the way . . . saw the shaft's walls vibrate with its violence.

The *Chonya* ship hurtled down the huge volcanic pipe like a shooting star. Barely in time, it braked and based upon the ramp.

Before she could read his thoughts, Shane snatched up Kyrsis bodily and raced through the smouldering pronic rubble to the

*Chonya* craft.

"Blast!" he shouted, and swung aboard; and almost before the hatches were shut, the ship was in the air again, lancing up into the sky.

The commander said: "Where now, *Gar* Shane? What are your orders?"

**T**HE Earthman laughed harshly. "Send out the word to break the Federation fleet into squadrons, each to stay far from the others, and all to strike at Gadar. We'll see how many mteor swarms our friends down there can muster!"

"And the rest of us—the *Malayas*, *Chonyas*—?"

"You'll follow me," Shane said. He took the jet-globe. "I'll set the course."

Kyrsis' eyes were like great violet flames. "Pay him no heed, *Chonya*!" she cried hoarsely. "Kill him! Lock him away! He is of Earth, and he has gone mad with fear for his homeland! He takes you there to try to battle another, greater meteor-swarm! It will be the death of all of you!"

The *Chonya* glanced curiously at her in her disarray, then looked into the visiscreen, the jet-globe. "A *Chonya* holds no fear of death, Silver One," he observed, iron-steady. "Besides, our course is set for Jupiter, not Earth."

"Jupiter—!" the woman cried, and now a new note of panic was in

her voice. She clutched Shane's arm. "Why Jupiter, Earthman? Why?"

"Not Jupiter, Kyrsis, but one of Jupiter's moons," Shane answered thinly. "You see? There it lies in the visiscreen."

"Jupiter V—!" the silver woman whispered. "No, Shane! No—!"

"Yes, Kyrsis!" the Earthman came back coldly. "Jupiter V, the place where Reggar held me prisoner. And the satellite closest to the planet, a satellite heaped twelve levels deep with power converters."

"No, no—"

Relentlessly, Shane hammered on: "Who was it wanted all that power? Who built that great Paulsini unit? Not any slaver, surely! No, that took skill and science and years of work. And when it was done, your people had more power than the world had ever known—power drawn from the endless seas of energy of Jupiter's great Red Spot, the heat of oceans of flaming hydrogen, the force that lies congealed in gases held under such pressures that they turn to solids, all turned somehow to your use by those new converters that I saw there."

The silver woman looked at him. A little of the wildness left her eyes, replaced by something that might have been cunning. Her voice came down to its former liquid murmur. "And what will you do when you get to this moon, Earthman? Will it bring back the cities

of your native planet?"

"Say what you mean," Shane came back tightly.

"Perhaps Earth could be spared—for your aid against the other worlds of the Federation."

Shane's eyes blazed. "You *do* think me a fool, *Shi* Kyrsis! After all that has gone, can you believe I would trust you?"

"It is a chance you must take, if you would save Earth's cities."

**S**TRAIN showed in Shane's voice, his face. But his jaw stayed hard, his blue eyes steady. "If Earth must go, then go it will, *Shi* Kyrsis. For all I know, the meteors may this moment be hurtling down. But even if they are, and though it costs me my life and my homeland, I'll still take the chance in order to break your life-sucking people's power."

"But you cannot destroy that power—"

The *Chonya* commander broke in: "More meteors, *Gar!* They gather between us and the satellite!"

And Kyrsis jeered. "You see, Earthman? You have lost already!"

Shane said to the *Chonya*: "We're going through."

"Through the swarm?" The commander's face lost a little of its color, but his voice stayed firm. He picked up his space-phones. "I shall give the order."

"We're going through," Shane repeated grimly, "and some of us—those who have repellers—may get

there. There will not be many, but only a handful of workers can be on that moon, with Reggar's crew withdrawn, so even a few ships will be enough."

"Yes, *Gar*," the *Chonya* nodded coolly. He spoke into the space-phones, gave the order.

The ship lanced into the swarm.

There was a nightmare quality to those endless moments. Space was suddenly ablaze about them with a thousand screaming lights that slashed at them from all directions. Off to the right, a great ball of fire appeared from nowhere and blotted out a ship. A streak of flame speared through another, and it exploded in mid-flight.

And still they drove on through the tempest, tossed and jostled, beaten, butchered.

An alarm bell clanged fiercely.

"A rip in the hull, upper port," the *Chonya* reported grimly.

Jupiter V was very large in the screens now. It loomed like a monstrous metal ball, glistening with the hood of structure that encased it.

"The swarm is following us now," the commander said. "It moves with us, traveling even faster than we are." His lips twisted wryly. "Their control is getting better all the time."

Shane stared into the visiscreen. It was as if the satellite were hurtling up to meet them. The exploding speed of it made the screen seem almost to whirl.

And still the meteors swarmed and blazed around them.

"Thirty seconds more," the *Chonya* said. "We must brake by then, or crash instead of ramp."

JUPITER V now extended past the edges of the screen. They could see but a segment of it—a segment that raced ever upward, ever towards them, dividing into a thousand and finer details every second.

"Twenty seconds," the *Chonya* reported.

The meteor swarm seemed to close in about them—tighter, tighter.

"Fifteen seconds."

The meteors' light was stunning, blinding.

Shane's teeth were clenched, his lips parted, his eyes glued tight to the viewer of the visiscreen. The muscles stood out along his neck. The tension about him was a living thing.

"Ten seconds."

A sort of paralysis seemed to grip the Earthman. He stood frozen, still staring like one in a trance.

The ribs in the satellite's casing stood out, now—the ports, the vents.

The meteors seemed to have grown to blazing suns.

"Five seconds."

Shane's paralysis broke. He snatched at the phones, and of a sudden his eyes were blazing like the nightmare scene beyond their hull. "Veer!" he shouted. "Don't land! Veer—!"

The *Chonya* commander's hand struck the jet-globe with a crack

like a whip. It spun till it sang, racing round and round.

The ship swung out in a wild gyration. Reeling, slashing crazily across the moon's perimeter, it hurtled off through space.

Behind them, the other ships, too, were peeling clear.

But not the meteor swarm. Down it plunged, down, in the course the ships had followed, straight at the hundred-mile ball that was Jupiter V.

"They'll crash—!" the *Chonya* cried, and jubilation was in his voice. "They did not know we were so close! Now it's too late to turn them!"

The explosive flash of the meteors bursting through the satellite's casing came like an exclamation point. Great cracks appeared — monstrous fissures, spewing flame.

And still more meteors hurtled down—the whole, vast, captive swarm. The planetoid's casing glowed red-hot, then white, till the moon was a fiery, radiant sphere.

Then suddenly, it seemed to shiver. A gigantic explosion ripped one side, sent the planetoid spinning over. A huge, wedge-shaped chunk tore loose and blasted off through space; then another . . . another.

**WITHOUT** a word, the commander of the *Chonya* craft picked up the manual on interspatial navigation, rifled through to the page on Jupiter V. Tore it out, crumpled it, dropped it to the floor.

Shane threw him a grim, tight grin and said: "There's still work, back on *Gadar*."

The *Chonya* spun the jet-globe; focussed the visicreen on the dark star.

Even as the image drew sharp and clear, a ship shot out of one of the great volcanic pipes that served as the planet's ramping spots.

Shane's face went dark again. "That's Reggar's ship. Where is he going?"

And then, beside him, Kyrsis said, "Oh, no—!"

Shane turned at the sheer, stark panic in her voice.

Her face showed even more.

The Earthman looked back to the visiscreen again; and this time he, too, rocked under the impact of the thing that was happening.

*Gadar* was moving from its orbit!

Faster it went, and faster, slashing a course towards outer space. The ships of the Federation fleet raced madly from its path.

"No—!" Shi Kyrsis cried again. "No, they must not leave me!" Her face was working now, contorted. The silvery tones seemed duller, more like lead.

In an awe-struck voice Shane said: "This is the way they must have come! It was no cosmic accident! They hurled their own planet across the void—"

"No, no!" the silver woman shrieked, and the wild hysteria in her tones was giving way to mad-

ness. "They can't, they can't! I must go with them—!" Her twitching face was no longer human.

Then, before anyone could stop her, she turned and ran—out of the door, away from the control room.

But outside the room there was no place to run . . . only an echoing, well-like shaft that dropped away a hundred feet through the vitals of the ship, its depths linked only by a steel-runged ladder.

Unseeing, unheeding, the silver woman plunged over the brink and plummeted downward. Her scream rose and fell in the banshee wail of a soul in torment.

It ended with a sound like the bursting of an air-filled paper bag a room or two away.

The *Chonya* sucked in air. He let it out with a sound that might have been pity.

White-lipped, Shane said: "There was a *Chonya* child, a little girl . . ." Abruptly, he turned away and spun the jet-globe.

The ship's commander frowned. "I do not understand, *Gar* Shane."

The Earthman's eyes stayed on the visiscreen. He said: "My road still lies before me. It leads to Quos Reggar, and my great iron belt, and Talu, the *Malyalara*."

### CHAPTER XIII

THEY picked up the trail in the asteroid belt, in the wreckage of a gutted town. It led to Horla, then, and from there to the burning

sands of Mercury's barren wastes, and then back out to the moons of Saturn. But always Reggar was a jump ahead, and always there was blood and death and pillage.

Once, on Juno, Shane thought he had him. But Reggar blasted off as the Earthman ramped in, and they lost the trail in the outer asteroids.

And then, one night, Shane came to Titan.

As always, there was desolation. As always, the great slaveship was gone. And a weeping *bartok* woman shook her fist at Shane and cried, "So now you come! But they have killed my man. My children starve, and I am left to care for Reggar's cursed, dying *Malyalara*—"

Shane turned on her, "A *Malyalara*—? Quos Reggar's *Malyalara*?"

An emotion that might have been fear flickered in the woman's eyes, and she would have fled had Shane not caught her arm. "Please, Earthman—!" she pleaded piteously. "My man is still warm in his grave. I say strange things — senseless, without meaning. Please let me go—" And when Shane released her, she scurried off through the rubble like a frightened mouse and disappeared in the ruins of a broken building.

But Shane followed her—cautious, cat-footed; through alleys and shadows and tumbled wreckage; till finally she went into one of the ancient, conical, loaf-like hovels in

the oldest part of the native city.

For ten long minutes the Earthman watched and waited. Then, half-angrily, he rose from the place where he lay hidden, and slapped the gun slung at his hip, and strode to the door through which the woman had gone. His knock echoed.

After a moment the woman opened the door a crack. When she saw who it was, her eyes went wide, and she tried to force the door back shut.

But Shane put his weight against it and held it open, and said, "I want to see your house, *bartok*."

"No, no—!" the woman panted.

"I must," Shane said. As gently as he could, he pushed her aside, and stepped into the room.

And there was Quos Reggar.

THE giant mongrel stood in the corner, behind the door through which Shane had entered. A light-pistol gleamed in one webbed hand, and the great lobed eyes were hot with hate.

And about the creature's waist still was drawn the iron-linked belt—Shane's *Chonya* belt, the belt of the asteroids.

"Welcome, Earthman!" the mongrel rasped, just as on the other night that now seemed so far away, so long ago. "Welcome to death!"

Shane froze in his tracks—statue-like, taut-muscled. His eyes alone moved . . . gauging Quos Reggar, measuring the distance, weighing the light-gun against his own draw.

And the mongrel saw the things

in the cold blue eyes—the death, the decision; and he snapped sharply, "No, *chitza!* Wait—!"

"Why?" clipped the Earthman. "Why put it off?" And there was recklessness in his voice; a fierce exaltation.

"Because it may be you need not die!" the mongrel came back swiftly. "Because there are things you do not know—things that still may save your life and make it worth living."

Shane still stood taut, motionless, waiting. He did not answer.

"I thought you would come to Talu's name," the hybrid told him, and now the creature's tone held a gloating note. "I planned it well—and you, fool that you are, came to the trap as on wings of fire."

"Get on with it!" Shane slashed harshly. "We both know what is between us. Why waste this time?"

"The time is not wasted," Reggar answered. "Your coming here as you did proves something . . . a fine point on which much may hang, for you as well as me."

Shane bared his teeth. His left hand moved in a savage, contemptuous gesture. "Get on with it!" he slashed again. "What is it you seek to say?"

A sly smile of sorts came to Reggar's lips. He called: "Talu—"

"Here, *Sha* Reggar." She stepped through the doorway, lithely graceful as always, garbed in a *bandong* of scarlet and gold. A gold clip held the midnight hair, and a

gleaming fire-ruby of Neptune hung by a golden chain in the hollow of her throat.

Her eyes met the Earthman's, poised and calm. "Sha Shane . . ."

A TOUCH of color came to Shane's lean face. Quickly, he looked away, back to Quos Reggar.

But a ghoulish grin twisted the mongrel's lips. "Why stare at me, Earthman? Look at her, look at her! Is she not lovely?"

Shane's eyes did not waver. "I'm listening, Reggar," he answered tightly.

The hybrid chuckled. "You came quickly, Earthman . . . so quickly, when you heard mention of this woman. You threw caution to the winds and came alone, in spite of all sense and judgment."

"So—?"

"So I knew there is a feeling between you and this *Malyalara* — a thing without logic, beyond your judgment, perhaps what you humanoids call love."

The color heightened in the Earthman's face. "You're mad as a *ban*, Reggar!" he challenged angrily.

"I think not," leered the mongrel. "And it is good. Because you shall have the woman—untouched, too, Earthman, for I am not as your race, and she could never catch my fancy, save as a pretty toy."

"And the price, Reggar?" Shane queried tightly. "What must I do to earn such favor?"

The creature before him shrugged. "I need not feign you have not hurt me. For you have. You and your *Chonyas* have harried me through the void, and up and down among the planets. You've tracked me down as the *zanth* tracks down its prey. But now, I tire of being hunted. My crew is weary and sick, and the hull of my ship is worn to cracking. So I have stayed behind this time to strike a bargain with you, if I can."

"A bargain?" The Earthman laughed harshly. "When was your word ever worth a *xi*, that I should take it now?" His eyes narrowed, and he studied the other. "Besides, what bargain could I make? The Federation hunts you also."

"The Federation?" Reggar sneered. "Loot will always buy someone in the Federation. But you—you fight from hate; and that is different."

"Then why haggle with me? Why not kill me now, if indeed you fear me?"

"Why does anyone bargain?" Again the mongrel shrugged. "Because you have something I want and need—something I cannot get without your aid."

"Well? What is it?"

Thoughtfully, the great lobed eyes surveyed the Earthman. The rasping voice sank lower. "It is sanctuary, *Gar* Shane. That is what I seek . . . a place in the asteroids to hide, away from the eyes of the Federation. As for you, you need

not even call off your war against me. Not openly; you will merely manage never quite to find me."

THE Earthman frowned. He looked away—to Talu, still standing in the open doorway; to the woman who'd lured him here, mousy and frightened in the farthest corner; to the tawdry room and its tawdrier trimmings.

Then, at last, his eyes moved back to Reggar. In a tone of wonderment, he asked, "Did you really think that I might do it?—That I might break the oath I swore; betray the trust the *Chonyas* gave me with their great iron belt?"

Almost silkily, Reggar murmured: "Before you refuse, there are things you should consider."

The cloak of control fell away from Shane. His blue eyes blazed. His jaw was hard. "I swore my oath on the star-stone of Hiaroloch, Reggar," he slashed harshly. "There's nothing in this world or any other that will make me break it." And then, with savage force: "Get on with your killing, butcher—and make sure your first beam hits me true, for it will be your last!"

The mottlings stood out on Reggar's scaly face. The light-gun thrust forward, and muscles stood out along the webbed hand's bones. "Perhaps there is a thing you have forgotten, *chitza*!" he snarled. "Perhaps you do not recall—the *theol*!"

"The *theol*—?" And though the words came out as a question, al-

ready the color was draining from the Earthman's face.

"Yes, the *theol*, *starbo*—and you know what I mean, for the fear is crawling through your eyes like the worms of Thora! Two doses you've had. A third will make you my slave forever!"

The muscles in Shane's neck knotted. His head came forward just a fraction. "Wrong, Reggar!" he clipped. "To make me stand and take the *theol*, the fear of death must be in me even stronger. And that dread I do not have. I'll fight —here, now! So the choice is yours, not mine! You must kill me, or die yourself—"

"Wait, Shane!" cried the mongrel. "There is more! There is the woman—the *Malyalara*!"

Shane went rigid.

"I can kill you," rasped Reggar. "Have no doubt about it. My gun is out, and yours is still holstered. But let me tell you this: if I do, Talu is the one who shall suffer! I'll sell her in the brothels of Uranus! The great, hairy beasts there shall have this woman of yours—and she will be a long time dying . . . "

**S**HANE'S lips drained white. His face grew grey. Of a sudden his hands were shaking.

"Is it not a pretty picture, Shane?" the creature before him gloated. "You dead—the *Malyalara* sold for the sport of the beasts there on Uranus—and all because you would not stretch your oath even

a little—?”

“Damn you, Reggar!” the Earthman whispered. “Damn you, damn you, damn you—”

“Then it is agreed?” the mongrel cried, in a voice alive with hideous glee. “You will promise me sanctuary, somewhere in the asteroids? You’ll pledge your sworn word to hide me and shield me and give me aid?”

“Reggar—” The veins were throbbing in the Earthman’s temples.

Only then Talu cried out, “No, Shane! No—!” She rushed forward, hurled her lithe body straight at Quos Reggar. “I would rather die than see you yield! You know the things this monster has done to the *Malyas*, the Chonyas! Kill him, kill him—!”

A roar of rage burst from the mongrel. His clubbed light-gun slashed down at the woman’s bare breasts, trying to drive her off.

Shane leaped like a tiger. He clawed at the hybrid’s pistol; wrenched it back — away from Talu’s supple body, hard against his own.

Twisting and snarling, Reggar crushed down the exciter.

A faint, misty spray spurted from the muzzle, straight into Shane’s throat.

But now Shane’s own gun was out. Purple light slashed like a sword at the mongrel’s belly.

Reggar reeled back. He smashed a wild blow to Shane’s head, sent the Earthman crashing to the floor.

Again Shane fired.

Reggar’s mottled face went black under the beam. An awful scream rose in his throat. He tottered . . . lurched . . . fell.

Talu was with Shane, then—clutching him to her, the dark face all anguish. “Shane, Shane . . . ”

**D**AZEDLY, the Earthman muttered, “The light-gun . . . what happened to his light-gun? He triggered it straight into my throat—”

With an effort, he rolled to the weapon; broke it open.

The ray mechanism was gone. A hypodermic injector had been inserted in its place.

Shane’s hand clutched his throat.

There was still a trace of moisture there . . . clear, colorless moisture.

Talu whispered: “Shane, let me hold you—”

Shaking, he forced her away. His voice quaked: “No, *Malyalara*. No! Get away from me—now, while you have the chance—”

“Shane, what is it—?”

Numbly, he showed her the gun. “An injector—with *theol*. It makes three doses. In the end, Reggar wins. The madness will come upon me—”

“No, Shane—” She would have embraced him.

“Get away!” he shouted fiercely. “Don’t you understand? This was the third dose—the dose that brings madness. And there is no cure—”

His face was a mask—all despair,

and all fury.

She laughed, gently, then—warm, comprehending. There was no panic in her face, her voice. "No, Shane," she told him. "There will be no madness."

He stared at her blankly. "It is *theol*—"

"Yes, it is *theol*. But not the third dose."

"Not the third—?" His tongue stumbled.

"No, Shane. Because before the third, there must be a second, and I gave you what Reggar thought was the second that night back at Horla. But he left me alone for a moment with the injector, and I replaced the *theol* with another solution—without color, but harmless."

A choking sound rose in the Earthman's throat. His trembling hands touched her—smoothed her

hair, brushed her shoulder.

She came to him—smiling, lips warm with welcome. And suddenly their bodies were together, tight-welded, and he was whispering feverishly, "Talu . . . Talu . . ."

And when at last they parted, she said, "I am yours, Earthman . . . yours now and forever. But you still have a role to play, your oath to uphold. You are *gar* of the *Chonyas*."

"And you will rule with me!" he answered her fiercely.

"Your belt, Earthman . . ."

"My belt . . . the belt of the asteroids." Bending, he stripped the iron links from the corpse of Quos Reggar and girded it tight about his own waist once more. His eyes met Talu's. "Come, *Malyalara* . . ."

Together, they crossed the threshold, into the night and the stars.

*The End*

## INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR - *Dwight V. Swain*

(Concluded from Page 2)

to read Dwight V. Swain's stories aloud to her.

Since she was a professional voice coach, I finally won her over by writing a fantasy about the doings of a bunch of echoes who lived in an opera house. I received my draft notice as a wedding present, however, so the next three years were somewhat discombobulated by army-sponsored travel.

Since my discharge I've written a lot more copy, wandered over a lot

more country, and acquired a five-year-old son named Tom who insists that all my space ships go to Venus.

I'm now a script writer for the University of Oklahoma's motion picture unit. My spare time goes to my family, my friends, my library, and piling up hours towards another degree.

I also write fiction.

I hope you like it.

—Dwight V. Swain

\* \* \*



As his fingers tightened he heard the insistent ringing of Lisa's telephone . . .



# THE ANSWER

By  
*Emil Petaja*

**He had strangled Lisa many times in his dreams. But always, as she died, the phone rang. Did he dare to pick it up and answer the call? . . .**

THE room was dark. It was always dark, so dark he couldn't see the bed, the soft wide bed with the plum satin head-piece that was studded with cushioned buttons, and the triangle of chiffon that was draped elegantly from the ceiling. The venetian blinds were shut tight, so that not even the blackness of the black summer's night could be seen.

John Reeve couldn't see the bed, and he also couldn't see his tall self in the modern half-moon mirror of his wife's dressing table across from him. Most of all he couldn't see her—Lisa, his wife.

But he could hear and smell. He could hear Lisa breathing softly. He could scent her intoxicating perfume which clung to the hot windless air of the room. Then there was the uneven pounding of his own heart—that told him he *was* here, here in his wife's apartment.

It was so late. It was that dark hour when the planets themselves sleep, couched against their black bed of space. It was that dark hour when illusion takes hold and reality wavers in the balance.

Standing there, John Reeve forgot. He forgot—everything. Who he was, where he had come from, what he was doing here in Lisa's uptown apartment. He didn't belong here. Lisa didn't belong to him any more. It was over. She belonged to—

Why? Why had she left him?

He couldn't remember. He tried, but he couldn't remember. He couldn't even remember how he got in here. Had he stolen a key? Bribed the red-head at the desk downstairs?

He couldn't even remember two minutes ago.

He stood there in the hot windless dark, listening to Lisa's soft breathing, listening to the uneven

rhythm of his heart. He sucked in the heady perfume that he had reason to remember so well. He did remember *that*. He saw rows of little bottles, lavender bottles, oddly shaped bottles. Anniversaries. Birthdays. No special days. What was it called? Tigress? Musetta? Jealousy? Maybe. Maybe that was it. He couldn't remember concreteness, only things you *feel* more than you think about.

Why didn't Lisa ever open her window at night? Such a hot summer's night as this?

He curved a little smile into the perfumed dark. Lisa had always been like that. Always. No fresh air fiend Lisa. Lisa shrank from draughts as from dragons. She always kept her windows shut tight at night. They had quarrelled about that—too. Lisa loved warmth. She was like a kitten snuggling cosily in front of the fire, a lissome tawny-haired kitten.

And now.

**J**OHN Reeve sighed. Because now he remembered the one important thing he had to remember. He remembered why he had come here, to Lisa's uptown apartment, now in the darkest corner of the hot summer's night. All in a rush it came to him, a rush of tremulous feeling. There was no thought behind it. It was pure feeling. He didn't stop to analyze the wherefores to any degree, or to catalog them neatly in the pigeonholes of his brain. He just knew what he had to do and he

did it.

He walked over to the bed and strangled Lisa.

It wasn't bad, but the long moment afterwards was.

The room was just the same. The windless heat, the jealous scent of Lisa's perfume mingled with the scent of her tawny unseen hair. His hands saw it though, blindly, so soft and silky under them. Lisa was so still, she died so gently.

The silence, while he hung there over Lisa, barely touching her hair, held as in a cup all the ache and the agony a man can endure.

Then the telephone started to ring.

He didn't look at it. This sudden sound, shattering the cup of silence, made him shudder.

It rang and rang.

*Answer it.*

It was a prickling voice in his mind. No, it wasn't. It was a tiny ghost that had hidden in the curve of his ear and was whispering into his ear's cavern, then shouting merrily against the membrane of his eardrum:

*Answer it!*

It was Lisa. He recognized her voice.

He pulled up sharply, tossing a heavy breath across the bed.

Lisa, you fool! If I answer it, then they'll know I was here. They'll say I killed you and they'll strap me down in a chair and send ten-million volts of electricity through me and I'll be as dead as you are.

The voice changed now. It wheed-

led, it caressed, it coaxed him. It made a joke out of it. Then—

*Please answer the telephone, darling. You know I can't stand to leave it ring like that. It's somehow — sacreligious. Please, darling.*

It was true. If Lisa were alive she wouldn't leave her telephone ringing like that, never. That was one thing Lisa was meticulous, even fetishistic, about. She might not be so meticulous about other things, such as husbands, but she invariably flew to the telephone when it rang. She used to lie on her silken bed and talk to it for hours, caressing it with her long red-tipped fingers. Lisa had loved the telephone. She had loved it above everything else. Maybe more than John. What do you mean, maybe? Of course she loved it more than she loved John!

He didn't move, so the ghost in his ear began to taunt him.

*You always used to want to know who was calling me, John. You used to insist on knowing. You used to try to beat me to the telephone. Well, now's your chance—*

John Reeve stiffened. That was true, too. All too humiliatingly true. He made a rough noise in his throat, then brushed a hand across the darkness. He located the telephone by its impudent burring. He reached for it—and almost had it.

Then he woke up.

**O**F course it was only a dream. Of course! He hadn't really killed Lisa. It was only this dream

he kept on having over and over and over. A man could go out of his mind —

And always the same. That was why he couldn't remember going to Lisa's apartment, or getting in, or anything like that. Just being there, feeling the oppressive summer heat, the dark silence, scenting Lisa's jealous perfume, wondering why she never opened a window, and then strangling Lisa.

But the telephone was the worst thing.

He didn't like to strangle Lisa, it was definitely not the act of a gentleman, and John Reeve considered himself a gentleman. He was never crude, at least. When Lisa said casually one night 'after dinner. "Darling, I'm leaving you," he didn't exactly yawn but put something of the effect of a yawn into his smile. "Are you, dear?" He was too much of a gentleman to try to hold her if she wanted to go, even for one day.

But it hurt. It had clawed his heart all that night, and the next, and all the next nights until —

Of all the things that tortured him in his dream, the telephone was by far the worst. Why, why, why did the dream have to end just there? It was just as Lisa, or Lisa's ghost in the dream, said. He was curious. He had to know. It was driving him crazy not to know. Once he thought that by straining at the dream and forcing it to go on, his fingers did actually contact the cold surface of the telephone. But he wasn't sure.

He wasn't sure.

More and more the dream obsessed him. Like a succubus it drained him, and pummelled him, and lay heavily on him. He did other things; his existence must have included innumerable other things such as eating, brushing his teeth, bathing, working. Working, of course. Working at what? Sometimes he thought vaguely that it had to do with fuel. But what did that matter? The dream was the only thing that mattered! It was the important factor in his miserable existence!

Always the same. Always the telephone ringing, just after he strangled Lisa. Always the little ghost in his ear. He tried to reach the telephone. He strained hard, but he never could, not quite. It was the damndest thing.

Oh, it must have been eons, at least, before the dream began to edge in his favor. Perceptibly, the dream began to last longer. Each time he fought to keep the dream going. That was the only way he would ever know. The conclusion of the dream lay in his actually picking up that telephone and finding out who was calling. He had to know.

Lisa's ghost pleaded and begged him to answer it. Her telephone mania in life had extended itself beyond the grave. She had to know, too.

*Answer it, darling. You always have to know everything . . .*

No, damn you! He fought her, at first. Then they'll know I was here!

They'll pin your murder on me! They'll strap me in a chair and —

All the same, he knew he had to answer that telephone, no matter what happened. Lisa had always teased him about his curiosity in the matters of her many telephone calls. It was the not-knowing that was sheer torture —

Finally it came.

Finally.

THE room was quite dark, it was always dark. He couldn't see the bed, the soft wide bed with the plum satin headpiece that was studded with cushioned buttons, and the triangle of chiffon that was draped elegantly from the ceiling. The venetian blinds were shut tight, the summer heat was stifling, it was like an impenetrable wall . . .

But he could hear and smell. He could hear Lisa breathing softly. He could scent the madness of her perfume. He couldn't remember how he came here, now in the night's darkest corner.

Why doesn't Lisa ever open her window? Such a hot summer's night.

Lisa. Warm, cosy little Lisa. Like a tawny kitten curled up by the fire. She could never stand a single breath of cold air. Maybe that was why. Maybe some of his words were breaths of cold air. In the beginning everything had been so warm and cosy. Then—coolness, coldness. Why weren't you here when I telephoned today? You're always so careful to answer the telephone. Why not me?

Who was the man that called you on the telephone while you were out? Not your hairdresser! Not again!

Then Lisa went away.

John Reeve curved a smile into the darkness and walked to the bed and strangled Lisa.

Then the long silence before the telephone rang. It was so hot. His forehead was sticky. So frightfully hot here, without a single open window.

*Brrrrr.*

*Answer it. Answer it, darling!*

Why was Lisa so anxious, perched there on his earlobe? Why? Only because she'd always been fanatical about answering telephones while she was alive and that now, dead, she clung to her fetish. Or—was it to tantalize him into making his presence here in her apartment at the time of her death known, so that the police —

*Answer it. Answer it, darling!*

He reached for it in the darkness. This time he strained harder than ever. This time he reached it. He had to. He had to know. No matter what happened he had to know. It was driving him crazy. Surely such a torture must have an end.

He made it. His hand grasped the telephone and held on to it grimly. He put it to his ear in triumph.

"Hello?" he told it. "Hello!"

Silence. The room was a cup of black silence.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Who is this? Tell me who this is!"

There was a low wisp of laughter. It might have been the instrument, or it might have come from Lisa's tiny ghost, still perched on his earlobe.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"Central office," answered a voice like the largest pipe in a church organ. "Satan speaking."

THE END

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## *Don't Burn Them Up!*

THE very essence of a rocket is speed, and all the plans for the future have rockets hurling at incredible velocities toward the Moon. In the light of some recent experiments, this idea may have to be modified. For the first hundred and fifty or so miles up, there is enough air, thin though it is, to cause a tremendous amount of friction and the result is that the rocket gets glowing red when plowing through the air. If men are go-

ing to be put inside something will have to be done.

The answer of course is to operate the rocket at slower speeds near the Earth. While this cuts down on efficiency it is necessary to do this to avoid melting the rocket's skin. A study of meteorites and some experimental work with high speed bullets led to this analysis of high speed rocketry in the atmosphere.

\* \* \*

# HOLD BACK TOMORROW

By

*Kris Neville*



“HELLO, Margy,” he said bashfully when he came upon her standing beside the low, white stone wall which surrounded the schoolyard, isolating it from the carefully landscaped forest and lakes beyond.

“Hello, Clyde.”

“How are you today, Margy?”

“I’m fine, Clyde. How are you?”

“I’m fine, Margy . . . Mind if I sit down here?”

Feeling a little flutter of unnamed fear, she cried, “Go ahead. I don’t own the wall.”

Clyde put his hands behind him, found the top of the wall, and drew himself up until he could sit on the stones. He looked down at her, his chin level with her brown curls; he looked as if he had half expected her to turn and walk away, and when she did not, he smiled uncertainly. The

fear gone, now, she tilted her head and looked at him out of the corner of her eyes, once again the conscious master of the situation.

Clyde looked very boyish, peering down at her. “Don’t you want to sit down up here, too?” he said, waving his hand awkwardly.

“Maybe.”

“Here,” he said, offering her his hand. “I’ll help you up.”

She wanted to take the hand, but instead, she said. “Thank you, but I can help myself.” Gracefully she swung her lithe body up beside him.

Clyde glanced across at her, and she stared down at her swinging legs, telling herself to be very careful, and above all, not to look into his eyes when the mature confidence shone through.

Clyde cleared his throat nervously and made conversation by saying,



**It was so good to be young, Margy knew.  
She never wanted to be an adult—grow old and  
die in five centuries. That must not happen . . .**

"I . . . uh . . . feel sorry for Teach, don't you?"

Margy twisted and puckered her mouth, remembering Teach that morning; she had looked very bad, and the eye wrinkles were very noticeable, more noticeable than ever before. "Teach is wearing out," Margy said, trying to keep the horror out of her voice.

"I . . . uh . . . thought you'd notice; I don't think the rest of the kids did."

"She must be over four hundred," Margy said, feeling the cold place in her stomach become even colder.

"She'll be dead in another fifty years."

**M**ARGY shuddered as the coldness exploded through her whole body and tingled down to her finger tips, making her want to cry. "I hate to think of anyone dying," she said, wishing he would talk about the weather, or about anything but dying, wishing he were less serious, more embarrassed, and more like his old self.

"I just wondered if you'd noticed Teach. I *thought* you would. You—you know—you . . . uh . . . seem to understand things, Margy."

That seemed to expose all her nerve endings, and leave them raw and tingling. Biting her lip in anger, she said, "I do not! I don't understand things at all." If he didn't quit being serious, she would get down and walk away.

"Better than most kids, I meant. Better than *I* do."

She wanted to laugh hysterically, and she could feel her fingers curl in toward the palms. "You just think I do," she said.

"No. I'm serious, Margy. I mean it, really. You're more grown up than we are."

Her heart raced with terror, and her face was drained. She looked away so he would not notice. "Don't say things like that, Clyde. Clyde, if you say any more about that I'll—I'll just not ever speak to you again!"

"Aw, Margy. I don't want to get you sore. I'm sorry."

"It's all right," she said, her heart quieting slowly. What did he want? she wondered. Surely something. She could tell by the intentness of his face, the awkwardness, the suppression in his gestures, but what, she dared not guess, even though she was afraid that she already knew. She wanted to say, "Look, Clyde, let's just go on laughing like we have been. Let's laugh and laugh. And not talk very much. Not about things like death. I like you when you're a little boy and laughing. I'm afraid of you when you're a man and not laughing." But she said, "It's nice today, don't you think so?"

"Uh-huh."

**S**HE looked at him, and his face was red with embarrassment. He avoided her eyes, and he was his former self, at least for a moment. The self she wanted to touch and hold onto in the face of a swirling, mysterious, and frightening world: ex-

cept, more than anything else, she could not afford to touch him, and every day he was growing more and more away from her until one day he would be gone altogether, and she would not want to touch him any longer. It was infinitely sad to sit helplessly by while that happened.

"What did you want to see me about?" she said.

"I . . . uh . . . guess I forgot," he said.

But everything was about to break and shatter, and she could sense it. She sat pitted against herself and her own confusions, knowing what he wanted to ask her. It had been bound to come, sooner or later. What was she going to *do* about it? That, she was afraid to guess. Not today, she prayed intently, God, don't let him ask me to marry him today!

"Look, Margy," he said. "Can I walk you home, after school?"

But it would be today. Again, she could sense it. And if she said he could walk home with her, he would touch her, probably try to kiss her. Somehow, she would have to stop him from doing that. "Part way," she said hesitantly. Because she was afraid to deny him; she was afraid to lose him, yet. She didn't want that.

"I . . . want to ask you something, then."

"Please . . ." she said.

"Yes, Margy?"

"Let's not be serious. You've been getting so *serious*, lately. I don't like you when you're that way."

"I have not!" he said hotly.

"You have too," she said. She slipped down from the wall and ran wild and free toward the classroom building.

"Don't forget! After school!" he called.

Don't forget, she thought bitterly, running, don't forget . . .

**S**CHOOL was over, and they left the grounds together. The grass underfoot was soft and green. The shade trees around the path, pleasantly protecting. The neat, clean houses, set in the forest at intervals, individual proud flower beds a-dot in the smooth, close cropped lawns. The sky, bright blue with sunset on the horizon (through the trees) gold and purple, and the air, clean, perfumery. Adults moved around their homes, putting in the gardens, mending the tiny spots where mending was required; their faces were bright eyed, young, peaceful, but wise with the wisdom of experience.

"We're a lot alike," Clyde said after a while.

"Are we?"

"Don't you think so?"

"I don't know," she said, looking away from him, thinking that it would be nice to go on forever walking in the sunset like this.

"Where do you live?"

"Down here," she said vaguely.

"Oh."

They walked on, passed a pond almost covered with lillies that were opened out, in white and yellow bloom; passed a banyan tree, where

miniature turtle doves had gathered to coo softly for night; over a small wood bridge spanning a stream of clear hurtling waters.

" . . . You started school here just last year, didn't you?"

She swallowed down the tenseness in her throat. "Yes . . . I came from . . . the East." She knew that she should have said it more glibly, but the words seemed to clog in her throat.

"That's what I thought," he said. "I don't remember you before last year."

They came to a widening of the lane where an ancient tree stood alone, as if the rest of the trees had moved back to give it room, out of respect to its venerability.

He stopped her with his hand. "Wait, Margy."

The hand, warm on her elbow, was bad, and she wanted to shake it away, and she wanted to leave it there.

"Yes?" she said weakly.

" . . . Uh . . . Let's talk," he said, taking the hand away.

"Talk?" she said, trying to gain time and marshal her thoughts.

Then there was laughter from behind them, along the lane they had followed.

"Two of the kids from school," Clyde said disappointedly; he turned to wave. "No. It's all right. I see their adult bands."

Shortly, the adults, nodding pleasantly with the confidence and understanding of hundreds of years, passed them and continued down the lane,

looking no older than the two adolescents.

When they had gone, vanishing around a sharp bend in the lane, Clyde said, "Uh, Margy. Have you ever thought, I mean *really* thought, of having to grow up?"

" . . . Yes," she said, feeling a calmness come to her, an almost iciness, a resignation.

"It's awful puzzling: I mean, they *know* so much. It takes so long to become an adult. And you're always doing silly things that they don't do, and you don't know why. You don't *understand*. It's hard, to understand. And sometimes you're almost afraid you'll *never* be able to grow up."

**H**E was a boy again, now, and she felt her heart swell in sympathy as she watched him and listened to his words, and for a single moment, many things seemed possible.

"It's awful hard," he said. "And if a man has to do it alone . . ."

The calm was gone. *No, No!* she shrieked mentally, *No, please don't ask me!*

"It makes it so much harder," Clyde continued. "Have you ever . . . I mean . . . uh, Margy, it's kinda nice, I mean . . . to make an early first marriage, don't you think?"

She felt herself trembling, and her lips moved soundlessly.

"What I want to say, it's so much nicer to have someone. I mean, it helps you grow up faster. Gives you responsibilities. *Teaches* you, I

mean."

"I . . . I . . ."

"What I'm trying to get around to saying . . . Look. Sometimes these first marriages just go right on lasting. I mean, if two people, they're alike, they just stay on married."

She felt fire in her cheeks.

"Margy, will you marry me?"

Anticipation had not blunted the effect, and maturity shone in his eyes. Her face was white; blood fled from her lips.

"Clyde . . ."

"We're a lot alike, Margy," he said intently. "We could make it last. We've got a lot in common. For us it wouldn't be just a first marriage. It would be *the* marriage, the one to last always. And we both need to get married. To help us grow up."

"I . . . I . . ."

"Listen, Margy. I always thought . . . I mean, well, I've always thought you like me. A lot, I mean. I've always thought that—well—that you were in love with me, sort of."

It felt like her chest was being crushed by emotions; and she could see him spinning farther away from her. And she could not let him go. She could not lose him like this, just let him walk away. It wasn't fair. "I . . . I guess I am."

"Then we'll go down tomorrow for licenses? We'll have our check-ups, and . . ."

"No," she moaned, "no, no, no."

He drew her against him. She tried to turn her lips away, but she did not want to, and then it was too late, and there was nothing she

could do.

She forced him back. "Wait," she said. "I love you," she said. "Listen, you've got to do this. Listen. You've got to meet me tonight. At the library. At . . . at . . . nine o'clock." She took a deep breath. "You've got to do that."

"What's . . ."

She turned.

"Margy!"

Without daring to look back, she said, "Don't come any farther. Wait until tonight." Inside, she was crying and hurt and desperate and ashamed. Most of all, ashamed. Her nails dug into her palms until she felt the sharp pain. *What can I do?* she thought. *I won't go. I'll . . . I'll . . . I won't go. I'll leave . . .* There was a thin trickle of warmth across the inside of her hand.

But she knew that she would go, deeply, she knew that. And she was in love with him, and life was unfair, so terribly unfair, so unfair beyond all imagining.

**W**AITING for him, she was sick with a strange excitement that kept her blood alive and racing. She was afraid, too—mildly afraid, but fear could not stop her. Waiting, she remembered: their laughter, and a picnic lunch, once, when he had tried to hold her hand during the hour when they listened to the Music, again when he chose her twice in the social living game; and how unafraid and *warm* she had been then, until it began to break and crumble around her, and she

could feel him drifting away, toward Them—toward the utterly terrifying and complex and baffling and painful life beyond her, where she was afraid to go.

But she could not let him escape from her: for he owed her something more—he *had to* owe her something more; life owed her something more, and she would not be cheated. Then she would go away, and leave school, and go somewhere and try to start all over again, and most of all, really try to understand.

She was waiting for him just beyond the light that cascaded down the steps from the open doors of the library, and finally, when she saw him coming, a tall, lanky form coming uncertainly from the darkness, she felt her temples pound, and her knees were trembling.

He came to her side. Her hand, not shyly, now, went out for his, and he tried to draw back, startled by the strange intensity of her eyes. Then, without a word, she led him by the hand across the smooth grass toward the aspen trees around the tiny, moonlit lake.

When they were safely hidden among the trees, she pressed him to the ground, and to her the moon seemed pale and ghostly, and the water lillies, coffin flowers, and the cat tails, dead, furry fingers. Life was no longer sweet and innocent, and the lake smell was like decay upon the air.

"There," she said huskily. "Sit there. I'll sit by you."

Again she took his hand, and the

wind rustled the trees.

"I want you to be in love with me," she said.

"Uh . . . you love me, don't you?" he said uncomfortably.

"I want to be loved," she echoed stubbornly, and the wind sighed.

Lake water gurgled at the shore, and she thought it might be going down a drain, somewhere, the way time goes down a drain; although time goes silently.

SHE closed her eyes, trying to think, but she found only the eternal confusion in her mind; and the wind carried back some of her own sweet perfume smell to her, half sickening her. She licked her lips nervously, and her cheeks were hot.

"We'll get married and have our own home, and you can . . . "

She shrank away from him mentally; and looking at him, filtered by moonlight, she saw that he was old and although the aspen leaf that fell between them was still green, she knew that it was old and dead, too, and the grass under her left hand, though green, was dying. Terror filled her, and as a very small child, she had been in a dark room, somewhere, and there was rain and lightning; her father had come to hold her hand; she could remember his saying: "You won't die for a long time," although how he had come to say it, she could not remember. Ever since, she had, in the back of her mind, the thought: I'm dying now. And late at night, very often, she would awake with icy sweat on her

body to realize that some day there would actually come that last minute, as real as the present one, and how could she stand it?

" . . . the house," he finished; but she did not know what he had said.

"We don't have to get married," she said.

"Why not? I don't see why not?"

Her lips were trembling, and she wanted to cry. "Don't you see: I don't *want* to."

"I don't understand you," he said. "I don't understand you at all."

The moonlight patterned the ground.

"Look," he said. "We want to hurry and grow up, don't we? We want . . ."

Scarcely understanding, herself, she repeated, "We don't have to get married!" Her mouth was dry, and her hand, hot in his.

Doggedly, Clyde said, "I don't understand you, Margy."

**S**HE laughed tiredly, for he was gone, and it was almost too late, now. "Don't be serious. Tonight, don't be serious. Let's not talk any more about that. I don't want to talk about that."

"We've *got to*," he insisted. "We've got to learn to be serious. We can't go on like a couple of kids like this forever."

"There's . . . there's a lot of time, yet. We've got so much time . . . before we . . ." She wondered how the thought had almost crept into words, and she shuddered, while from across the lake, a tree frog began to

chirp eerily. "I'm afraid to think about dying," she said, and it was the most important thing in the world to make him understand that. "Dying worries me. I don't want to have to die." Her voice went on evenly, monotonously, in chorus with the tree frog, and her hand clamped his wetly, but she hardly listened to the words herself, because she knew that he did not understand what she was saying. "But I don't have to think about it. There's so much time left. And I want to stay young like this. Don't you understand, Clyde? I thought you said you understood me? I don't want to be sick and hurt. I want things to be simple and . . . pretty. Pretty. Can't you see that, Clyde? I don't care about anything else."

"You don't believe that," he said.

After a pause (while the wind quieted), she said, insistently, "I do. Yes, I *do*, Clyde . . . I really do."

He tried to release her hand.

And he was trying to cheat her; They were trying to cheat her. She did not know, she did not care. There was something inside of her, and it was desperation.

"Don't leave me, too," she sobbed. "I just want to be loved. I just want somebody to love me." Her arms were suddenly around him, strong and hungry, and the contact with him was electric, but somewhere in the back of her mind, blunted, a small voice moaned. "Please," she whimpered, her mind almost blank and spinning. "Please, Clyde. Like this. Just like this. When you touched me on the elbow this

afternoon . . . ”

He tried to draw away; but her arms held him tightly. Suddenly he put both hands against her breasts and pushed brutally. She fell back, stunned.

Clyde jumped to his feet and started to run, terrified.

“Clyde!” she moaned. “Clyde, don’t run away! Don’t cheat me, Clyde. Don’t leave me, Clyde.”

The wind was in the trees again, and she put her head on her arm and began to cry softly. “Clyde,” she whispered. (Or was it only the wind in the trees?)

SHE hardly knew why she came to school the next day; her body was leaden with fatigue, and in her mind there was a sense of impending doom. On the way down the soft, green path, she stared at the ground, and when an adult passed, she was afraid to look into his eyes, lest, somehow, he understand.

She should go away; as she crossed the school ground she knew that, but she was too hurt to go away, and nothing seemed to matter greatly.

And then she was in class and Clyde was not there. She wanted to run out into the sunshine, and run forever, mostly backward into yesterday, where everything was so very simple.

Looking at Teach, she could not help hating her: so poised, so calm, so understanding, so sure; even with the tiny crows-feet—the first signs of wearing out—around her eyes, as if she had never seen herself as a white

death’s head, and imagined the wind whispering over her grave and rustling the grass that had been her body, the green grass, dying. But Teach’s movements were still quick and lively, and her body did not look as if there was death inside of it, waiting.

And as she watched Teach conduct the class and play upon it as a maestro might upon an orchestra, she remembered the last night, and the wind, and the boy, and she felt *unclean*.

Time hung suspended; and every second the clock let fall was a heartbeat of increasing intensity. Suspense was in the air, and Margy knew that she was waiting, waiting with a wound up tenseness that would explode inside of her if something didn’t happen.

And it was almost a relief when the messenger came, and Teach said, “Margy, would you mind going into room C? Someone wants to see you there.”

Trembling, Margy stood up. “Yes, Teach.”

She left the room, her feet heavy, too heavy to turn toward the door and set running as she half wanted them to do.

SHE opened the door at room C and stood silently. There were three people in the room: Mr. Hershey, the co-ordinator, and a man and a woman; she did not need to be told that the man and woman were Clyde’s parents.

“Come in, Margy,” Mr. Hershey said kindly, but Margy couldn’t

move.

She looked around the room; and a corner, she thought, would be nice to hide in, if it was dark, and whoever was looking for her didn't have a light. But it was all over, and she was sick, and it was too much trouble to try to hide again.

Without raising his voice, the other man said, not unkindly, "Where's your adult band, Margy?"

Her eyes were listless and defeated. They did not glance toward her left upper arm. Automatically she said, "I can't wear one, yet."

"How old are you, Margy?" the woman said.

"I'm—I'm sixteen. Almost seventeen. Yes, I'm almost seventeen."

Mr. Hershey said softly, "I'm sorry, Margy. There will have to be tests."

She stiffened almost imperceptibly.

Clyde's mother bent forward. "Why don't you admit you're as old as I am?" she said.

"No, no, no," Margy moaned. "I'm not! I'm not! I'm *not!*"

"Now, now . . ."

"Let me alone!" Margy said. "Let me alone!" She felt life flow back into her empty body. "Why won't you ever let me alone?"

Mr. Hershey pushed a button.

"I don't hurt you," Margy said. And her eyes were wild, now, and her mouth twisted in shame and anguish. "I don't hurt anybody." She began to sob. "Please," she choked. "I just want to be young. That's all right, isn't it, to want to be young? That's all I want. Honest, that's all."

Mr. Hershey spoke softly into the phone. "Could you send over a couple of men? I'm afraid we've got another Revert for you."

"I don't hurt anybody," she said tonelessly. "It's no crime to want to be young. Why don't you let me alone . . . let me alone . . . alone . . . alone?"

And then she fell silent, her body shaking with repressed sobs as she stood in the doorway and waited for the two men to come and take her away.

THE END

## BIG NEWS FOR NEXT ISSUE! ---

*Geoff St. Reynard's great new novel:*

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This is the NOVEL you've been waiting to read! The brilliant sequel to Geoff St. Reynard's famed, THE USURPERS. We predict that it will go down in science-fiction history as one of your all-time favorites! The theme is a frightening one—the suspense terrific. You'll look at your best friends with a suspicious eye afterward. Who are the Usurpers? — Watch for the

*November issue on sale the First Week in September*

# MASTER RACE

*By Richard Ashby*

**The Invaders sent a scout to Earth to find out what kind of life inhabited it. But what sort of a conclusion could they draw from comic book heroes?**

ONE moment he was piloting a fast plane over dangerous green jungles . . . and the next Eddie was wide awake and peering through the gloom. Across the room Rags was whining softly and sniffing the damp night air that rolled in through the open window. The Scotty was excited, Eddie saw, and it must be something out of the ordinary for Rags' whimpering carried an undercurrent of perplexity and fear . . . and the dog wasn't a coward.

The boy called softly to him, but Rags, after tossing back a swift glance of recognition, put his forefeet up on the sill and peered, muttering, out across the pastures.

Eddie slipped from his bed and padded over to the window. As he comfortingly ruffed the fur behind the Scottie's ears, he listened intently at the night. At first he heard only the ordinary country sounds—roosters crowing over at the next farm, the muffled thumping of stock shifting about in the barn and against the corral fence; the flitting and high chirping of birds in

the cottonwoods and pepper trees. He took the dog in his arms and was about to go back to bed with him when he became aware of a sound that was very much out of the ordinary. A sound, Eddie decided, something like standing outside the Baptist church in Riverside when the organist was playing low, vibrant notes inside.

Eddie wondered how he could have first missed the sound, so firmly had it now become established. Where could it be coming from? It was, he guessed, about an hour till dawn, and no tractors or other farm machinery should be running. And it wasn't a radio.

A plane?

Leaning from the window he glanced upwards, then gasped in astonishment. Goose pimples of excitement tingled his skin, for there in the sky, above the oak tree on the ridge hung a pattern of sharp white lights. They were little lights, as if someone had strung together a fanciful arrangement of Christmas tree bulbs, then sent them dangling aloft beneath a kite.



*Illustration by Hannes Bok*

Rags' mutterings became deep and angry. Finally he gave vent to a short sharp bark.

Instantly Eddie quieted the dog. Lights or not, his mother had made it plenty clear about Rags' being in the house.

Crouching on the floor, both arms about Rags, Eddie whispered words of reassurance while he stared up

at the strange sparklings. The oak tree—the one with his tree house—was a scant quarter mile from where he knelt, and he wondered if its being so high on the ridge had caused it to draw some sort of lightning to itself. He'd read of that happening . . . chain lightning. Or was it called Fox Fire? Eddie couldn't remember. Anyway, it

looked something like that, he imagined.

But no lightning, he remembered, made a noise like a machine. Unconsciously, he'd hooked sight and sound together.

Frowning, Eddie let go of the dog. If the lights had been over the barn or garage, he'd have gone to tell his father. Or over the garden, his mother. But the tree house didn't concern them. It was his, and even if it hadn't been an hour before dawn he wouldn't have told his parents. He had things in there he shouldn't have, and it wouldn't do for either mother or father to go snooping around, even if they couldn't find his secret ladder and climb it.

He returned to the window.

Something thrashed in the highest branches of the oak. Rags began his whining again.

There was but one thing to do. He found his moccasins by the night table and pulled them on, threw a leather jacket on over his pajamas. From the wall above his desk, Eddie took down his .22, broke it, slipped in a shell, and tiptoed from the house.

The humming was stronger outside. Not louder, exactly, but more easy to feel. He crouched down, the way he'd seen commandos do in pictures, and began to run, holding the rifle at ready before him. And for once, Rags seemed content to stay at his side and not go dashing along ahead up the path. As they took the turn by the big rock a

startled nightbird plunged out of the bushes and took wing. The bird's violent rush brought caution to Eddie and he slowed his run to a walk. Suppose, he thought, that someone in a helicopter or maybe a balloon was hanging over the tree house. Spies, probably. And suppose they wanted the tree house for a headquarters.

He stopped, looked back down at the house dimly outlined in the starlight. Suppose, he continued, that there were too many of them. He'd just better sneak up quiet and see what was going on.

He eased himself around another turn in the path and came again in view of the oak. The lights were still there, but they no longer looked to be mere points of brightness against an empty sky. He stopped, more puzzled than ever . . . they looked like navigation lights on a ship, and a couple of them like the glow from inside a radio. And all of them were swaying gently in the night wind, twenty feet or so above the tree.

Rags went slowly ahead, two feet, three, four, then stopped . . . belly almost to the dust. His teeth shone in a soundless snarl, not a muscle of his body moving. Eddie had never seen him act like this, not even when the bear had come down into the valley to raid for chickens. Rags was plainly terrified, and something of the dog's emotion communicated itself. The boy bit his lip grimly, then strained to listen, heard what the dog was hearing; someone . . .

something was moving about up in the oak.

Some of his fear gave way to anger. "Messin' around in my tree house!"

He gripped the rifle tightly, took two determined steps forward. The third step he never completed. He was unconscious when he pitched into the ground. And when Rags leaped after him, he too crumpled as if dead . . .

THE Commander left his report-strewn desk and strode heavily over to the forward port. Glumly, he looked down at the frosty pitted surface of the satellite a thousand miles away, and in his imagination saw the planet that swung on the dead orb's opposite side. It was nonsense to have to hide behind a moon from such a primitive planet, waiting and waiting like a coward for reassuring information. But such prudence had ever been part of holy Law.

He sighed, turned away from the huge wall of window. Sometimes one wondered about Law, he mused darkly. One did not disobey, of course, but one could not help wondering sometimes. And occasionally one even wondered the blackest heresy of all—was it really important to kill all life everywhere for the sake of colonization.

The Commander caught sight of his reflection in a polished door panel. His own hard eyes glowered out from the reflection accusingly, so he pulled up his shoulders and

put all suspicion from his mind. Would he not destroy any of his people for such thoughts? Then he must not allow himself to entertain such blasphemy. Naturally, colonization was all-important. That was Law.

Picking up the pictures taken when they had first flashed into this system, the Commander saw again the nature of the beings they were about to exterminate. That they were ignorant savages, quite unworthy of the usual precautions now being taken, was plain to see. Their atmosphere showed heavy traces of carbon combustion, a certain indication that the creatures were inefficient, for who but a savage would burn matter to obtain power? The amount of radioactivity present in their gaseous envelope was so tiny as to prove that they had little or no knowledge of atomic power. There were no *frell* vibrations apparent; imagine existing without an understanding of simple magnetics!

He picked up an enlargement of one portion of a land mass, put a hand magnetic lens over it. The magnification showed clusters of dwellings, linked together by lines and double lines upon the ground—certainly the ultimate proof of low-order civilization, when beings chose to live clustered together, commuting by land, when they could spread themselves out over the surface of their planet and use the roads of the sky.

The Commander made a sign in the air with his fingers and a door

popped open at the end of the vast room. An aide ran toward the desk, halted, covered his face in salute.

"Sir?"

"How long has the scout been gone?"

The aide removed his hands from his eyes. "A day and a night, sir. He should be back any time, now."

"Fool!" The Commander roared out the word. "Did I ask for your guesses? I know he's due back. He is, in fact, one hour overdue." He did not know if this was or was not true, but it was good discipline policy. "Lock him away when he arrives."

The other covered his face respectfully. "Yes, sir." He turned, ran from the desk and out the door.

For a few minutes the Commander kept busy by calling the ten ray-centers of the three mile long ship, demanding to know if they were ready to beam. They were. He then spent a while ordering all unit leaders to hold their sections in readiness for inertialess drive. The unit leaders protested politely that they were. He called engine, commanded that they "look sharp." Meekly they assured him that all was well.

With only small satisfaction, the Commander rose from his desk, paced slowly over to the port again. As he gazed out at the moon's bland surface, he reflected that there was something about this nine planet system they were in that made him edgy . . . made him want to keep active and alert.

And where was that thrice-blasted scout?

He decided to have him flogged when he returned. Good discipline policy.

THE Scout woke from his drunken sleep and glanced at the clock on the dash of his little craft. It was very late, he saw. He would have to think of a fine excuse when he returned or they would put him in Truth and learn that all Scouts took the precious freedom of voyages to become intoxicated for a while.

Not much time! He would have to take what he could find in the vicinity. Small difference it made, though, since the beings of the planet were surely doomed.

The Scout yawned, then lifted the ship from the mountain and arrowed it down into the folds of the valley. His visor translated the immediate night into light, showing him the typically repugnant surface features of a type J planet: Foliage, sharp young geology, water flowing in natural beds. A world like a hundred others he'd visited in the name of Law.

When the floor of the valley came up he leveled off, then silently sped along in search of dwellings. Beneath him, on level stretches of land, stood odd four-legged creatures. The dominants of this world? he wondered. Probably not. The extremities of their limbs appeared to be too blunt and crude to do even the simple tooling he'd noticed during

his flight in. Beasts of transport, no doubt. Boldly, he swooped low over a group, scattering them in panic.

The meadow ended with almost sheer mountain wall, and the Scout whipped his craft up its face and down the opposite side. Something flickered in his vision screen and he swung the controls. A dwelling! In a moment he was back over it, hanging motionless. Sure enough, a revolting crude shack that nestled high in the branches of one of this world's surface growths.

This was it. There was no time nor need to search further.

He locked the controls, then turned on the deadly screen that would kill all life directly beneath, save one properly shielded such as himself, and would stun all life attempting to enter the edges of the field.

Pulling on his helmet, the Scout reached to the stud at his belt and reduced his weight to but a fraction of itself. Then he opened the hatch and clambered out into the air.

His first few minutes of exploration in the tree house were disappointing. There was no life, no corpses about for him to dissect and study. But the hunting club puzzled him. Obviously toolled by machinery and scuffed from much killing, it bore what might be a word burnt into its thickened end: "SPAULDING." He realized he was in an extremely primitive section of the planet, for this weapon was, no doubt, a trade article from some

more advanced portion of the globe. Too bad he'd had to land in this region. Dull.

The club he chucked into the bag over his shoulder.

A round object, made of some fairly soft material, with seams twisting over its surface next caught his eye. He took it up, shook it. It, too, bore the symbol "SPAULDING." Probably a totem word. Perhaps the sign of this particular tribe. He put it with the club. It was followed by a small package of soft white cylinders which were stuffed with crumbles of dried weed. Each cylinder bore the sign "CAMEL" as did the container, which also showed a beast, somewhat like those he had buzzed.

And beyond that there was nothing.

A simple people indeed, he pondered. He was about to leave when he noticed the stack of artifacts in one corner. The Scout bent to examine them. They seemed to be composed of the same material as the white of the "CAMEL" cylinders, but thicker and bound together in long wide flat construction. There were bright colors on the outside of each, and just as he discovered that the individual leaves of material could be separated and turned, the alarm bell sounded twice in his helmet. Life had blundered into the outer edges of his field.

Hastily, the Scout put a score of his latest finds into his sack and left the tree house. And without bothering to search for the life that

had triggered his alarm (Law specified a Scout was to flee in such an instance) he adjusted his weight and rose up to his waiting ship.

Minutes later he had passed the world's satellite and was in view of his parent craft.

THE Commander's first action was to order the Scout flogged before his comrades as an example of what awaited those who became lax in the performance of important duties. His second was to assemble the Council of Experts. When the eight old men had taken their places about the table, the Commander saluted them in the name of Law, then summoned his aide. "Is Decontamination through?"

"It is, sir."

"Then have the findings brought in."

The officer ran from the room and returned in a moment with the Scout's bulging sack. Gently he placed it in the center of the round table before the council. After saluting he took his leave again.

"Gentlemen," began the Commander, "we are met again to pass judgment on a corrupt, life-harboring planet. By the authority vested in me through the line of my father I charge you with the voice of Law." And so on, and on, with the ancient words of the ritual. The eight old experts hardly listened. They had sat through countless identical sessions during the hundreds of years of their lives. Theirs was but to view the oddities that

would presently be arranged before them, make mental records of their descriptions, and offer one or two tentative guesses as to the nature of the articles. But in any event, the action that followed would be the same. The creatures responsible for the articles would shortly be snuffed out . . . in the glorious and awful name of Law.

So they hardly listened.

When the Commander had finished with the rites of the occasion he unsnapped the bag and after peering within it, gingerly brought out the Scout's first find. Only now did the old men appear to take much notice. A few even leaned forward slightly. All eyes centered on what their Commander held.

"A phallic object?" asked the youngest.

"No. A lever," said the eldest.

"For killing," added the next.

"But it was made by machine," put in a fourth.

For a moment they were silent. The Commander placed the "machine-made killing-lever" on the table. It described a short little half-roll, bringing the printing into view.

"A religious design," said the youngest. "Obviously pagan."

"But rather well worked."

No one found anything further to say, so the Commander brought forth from the bag the next object. A mild flurry of interest ensued when it was discovered that this soft globular thing bore the same "religious design." But the sages would not venture an opinion as

to the thing's purpose, so the Commander took out the package of white cylinders.

Only the next to the eldest made any comment. He claimed that he had seen such articles in his youth, brought out from a system of three worlds that swung above a nova. The white things there, he reminisced, were units of value . . . useful in bartering. They were designed to be spent quickly, lest the stuffing fall out. The other experts agreed that these were no doubt also monies.

The Commander had been listening with but half an ear. Privately, he had long considered the experts to be but a muttering pack of senile dolts . . . dead weight, useless cargo on the ship. They worked not, neither did they breed. But Law demanded their presence. The Law, he mused, seemed strange at times.

He discovered the Council was waiting for him. Frowning to cover his embarrassment, he took out the last of the Scout's finds. For a moment all of them were struck by the bright colors on the flat surface. The one old man reached out a trembling hand. "Records," he murmured incredulously. "Records such as our own race is said to have once made, long long ago before Law." Reverently, he examined the cover, then with remarkable agility for one so decrepit he jumped to his feet and flung the thing from him. His face twitched with horror.

The others shocked and disbe-

lieving, fell to examining the rest of the new articles. In a moment, cries of alarm filled the council room. Chairs were upset, dignity forgotten. Only the eldest retained his composure, although with difficulty, for he could hardly manage to control the palsied shaking of his hands. The astonished Commander leaned over his shoulder and watched as the ancient turned the pages.

What he saw made the blood drum in his ears, made his vision swim, and only faintly did he hear the old one's croaking words. "Praise to Law, which we so carelessly accepted, for Law has saved us from the fiendish denizens of this planet. Had we attempted to exterminate them, their space armadas would have taken instant revenge. For they are obviously mightier than we." He put down the bright record of space craft vaster than the one which they occupied and took up another. On its cover was depicted a world being blasted into flaming wreckage, and within was shown the pictorial history of a space fleet, engaged in repelling an alien invasion, and who followed up their successful repulse by annihilating the entire system of the aliens.

Five more of the record books did they examine before the Commander's stunned mind at last reeled beneath the hideous concepts and he could look no more. Dumbly, he managed to reach the phones and order the ship thrown into emergency drive to some far and

lost point in space and dimension.

And as he waited for the shuddering wrench that signalled inter-dimensional shift, he tried to forget the horrors they had so narrowly escaped: Creatures who could make themselves invisible, who had mastered space travel, who worked in magic more powerful than that of Law's, who could whiff out entire solar systems, who could survive incredible mishaps and hardships. Creatures who were no less than Gods!

A wave of fear tore at the Commander as the glittering moon faded away. Eternal nothingness of grey enclosed the ship . . .

THE sun was up when Eddie recovered consciousness. Stiff and cold, he sat and looked around sleepily a moment before remembering. Then, as he saw Rags sitting before him, tail wagging happily, it all began to come back: Last night, sometime; humming lights above the tree house, someone moving about up there, himself sneaking up to see, then . . . nothing. He must have tripped and knocked himself out, somehow. Eddie snatched up the .22 and aimed it at the tree. "Whoever's up there," he said, getting to his feet, "had better come on out!"

Nothing happened.

Eddie bent down cautiously, his eyes still fixed on the tree house, picked up a rock and hurled it through the shanty's open door. A bird fluttered from the gnarled oak,

sailed across the morning meadow chirping angrily.

"This is your last chance. Come on out, or I'm comin' up and get you!" The bird's being there made him quite sure that everything was all right, so after a moment he pulled the knotted rope from its concealment in a cleft of the tree and went up hand over hand.

A strange odor lingered inside the shack. Something like . . . Eddie sniffed, frowned . . . something like a freshly blown fuse, but outside of that nothing seemed amiss at first. Then he discovered his softball and bat were missing. He found he didn't care too much. The season was over anyway; and besides, hunting and riding and fishing were more fun.

He looked further.

The cigarettes! He hoped the thief wouldn't snitch on him to dad. But that didn't make too much sense, he realized. The thief . . . a tramp, probably, was far away by now, maybe at this very minute trying to trade the ball and bat for a meal or a drink.

And those humming lights? Even now he wasn't too sure he'd seen them. Stars, probably. The Little Dipper, or maybe fireflies, or lightning. Sure.

He turned to go. The sun told him it was almost seven o'clock. Mother would be furious if she found him out in the morning without having dressed properly, or eaten.

It was then he saw that some-

thing else was missing, but because it was so late he didn't stop to worry. "Mandrake The Magician," "The Invisible Boys," "Buck Rogers," "Bat Man" . . . they were all old comic books. He'd finished

with them months ago.

Eddie clambered down the rope, and seconds later he and Rags were joyfully racing along the trail that led to home.

It was a beautiful morning.

THE END

## *Alien Science*

**I**F the other planets in our System are inhabited, or if the stars are encircled by inhabited planets, it will indeed be an immeasurable thrill to compare the development of these alien civilizations with ours. So far of course we can only do so in our imaginations, but generally speaking we seem to have a slight flaw there. We take it for granted that science will develop in the same way. We assume that the Aliens whatever their shape or form, will go through or have gone through the discovery of fire and the wheel and then up to an electro-mechanical civilization like our own.

Occasionally some daring author of science-fiction does take another tack; he assumes that the scientific development of the Aliens in no way resembles our own. Either they're *pure thoughts* themselves, using thought as a material tool, or they have tended toward developing other sciences than chemistry and physics as we have done. The only fault with the ideas is that they're rarely carried to their ultimate conclusions. Actually, what would such an Alien world be like?

We must first imagine naturally their environment which would greatly influence the course they'd take. If they were life forms living

at the bottom of a sea of ammonia gas and methane, we can be sure that the chemistry they'd develop would be really weird—a matter of catalysts etc., completely different from our heat-dominated science.

If the environment took any of many imaginable forms like the above, the wheel and axle combination would hardly be commonplace or particularly useful. On the other hand what incredible variations we might see in boat-building or in dirigible craft and gas-filled balloons!

Playing with such ideas can lead to many many imaginable possibilities. In fact they're inexhaustible, even adhering to the conventional laws of Nature that we know.

Sometimes the kibosh is put on these ideas completely by the often quoted limitation that life will and must of necessity, assume a form not greatly different from our own carbon-hydrogen-oxygen cycle. To this, we say, "perhaps." But it seems extremely remote to imagine that in this vast universe we won't encounter diverse and varied life-forms, radically different from Earthly animal-types. This is one field in which you can really give your mind free play! The Bug-Eyed Monster boys may not be far wrong!



# I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS

By

*William Campbell Gault*

**Ted really loved his wife, but somehow  
the blonde next door kept popping into his  
dreams—and making them a vivid reality . . .**

**E**L outer-thought, "I've had all I want of it, haven't you?" Nothing from Bee for seconds, and then: "I—don't know. I suppose. You've been inner-thinking, El. You've been brooding?"

"I've been brooding. When did our bodies go, Bee?"

"When Lust was killed. I think we made a mistake, El. I think, at the time, we were bemused. He wasn't the best of the gods, but he had his points. We've been inner-thinking alike, dear. This plane isn't enough. But what—" Silence.

She thought, "Over the hills? This isn't all of our land. There are people in Valdora."

"Not—the kind of people I want

to be. And how about the others, how about the Assembly? Will they feel as we do?"

"Why not? Don't they miss the colors they can't see, the grass they can't smell, the streams they can't hear? Weren't they human, too, once?"

"They were. And perhaps they think as we do. But they won't project anyone to Valdora. We don't want any part of that town. However, dear, I'll bring it up. If I had a belly, I'd have a bellyful of this."

In the glade they couldn't see, above the stream they couldn't hear, the Assembly met.

"New business?" the Peak thought.



"I've some," Bee thought. "It's — it may be mutiny."

"We'll listen," Peak answered. "Speaking for myself, and myself alone, I'm ready to listen to mutiny. So long as it doesn't involve Valdora. I wouldn't be surprised if the others agree. Could it concern the resurrection of a minor god who grew major?"

"Lust," Bee agreed. "I want a body."

Peak was silent as the affirmative thoughts poured in from the entire assembly. Then Peak thought, "I'm sure we won't need a vote on that. And how would we resurrect Lust?"

"Not by importing Valdorans," Bee answered.

"Nor Velugians," someone thought.

"Nor any of the others," Peak summed up for them. "So — . . ."

The scientist Lern thought, "Is this the only planet in the galaxy? Why confine our thinking?"

"Not that bloody Mars," Peak thought. "I'll veto that, every time."

"Earth?" Bee suggested. "What's wrong with Earth?"

Ha thought, "It would take too long to answer that one. From what I've heard of it, they're less ardent than arduous. How many lovers have they developed? Major league lovers, that is."

Bee protested, "One could be developed. The material's there, and the planet's attainable. I say let's project one of us in some innocent guise, some animal who talks the language."

"But who'd volunteer?" Lern wanted to know.

"No volunteers," Peak decided. "Ha will go, to improve his education. What he doesn't know about Earth needs knowing."

Lern thought, "How can we keep him minor, if we resurrect him? This Lust has a terrible appetite."

"That," answered Peak, "will be your job. You'll have to think of something that will keep his weight and power constant."

Ha was doing no outer-thinking; Ha was inner-thinking about Earth, and bodies.

**T**EDE Truesdale was sitting on the back porch, supposedly enjoying the sun. He was, in reality, enjoying the view. The blonde who'd bought the house directly behind them, and considerably below them, was out on her patio.

She was enjoying the sun. She wore a skimpy halter and a pair of shorts that were. She was well oiled and lying on her stomach. The tan of her shoulders and along the back of her legs was a fine wheat brown and she was due to turn over.

Ted was not lascivious, though Ann Truesdale had frequently stated he almost was. Ted, to put it honestly, was thirty-nine and worrying about the forties. It didn't seem logical that he would feel any different at forty than he had at thirty-nine. He'd noticed no change between thirty-nine and sixteen; he was a healthy man.

But there were so many stories

about the forties—and the fifties followed them so closely.

Now, the blonde was about to turn over. She had one hand, palm downward, on the blanket beneath her and—

And from the doorway, Ann Truesdale said, "Theodore Truesdale, you licentious old man. I never realized why you sat out—"

He turned to face his wife. His voice was a model of outraged innocence. "For heaven's sake, Ann—"

She sighed, staring at him. She was small and dark and well put together, and didn't look at all like a woman who could devote every conscious hour to the house. But she was.

"Ogling," she said.

"Oh, Ann—you'd think I was—" He shook his head.

"You are. Infidelity can be mental, I read somewhere."

"You *read*?"

"Don't be superior. I was looking up a recipe in Maitland's magazine, I think, and I saw the picture of this man staring, as you just were, and—"

"You've answered my question," he interrupted. "Ann, I love *you*."

"Well, that's a strange way to show it, I must say, just eating that divorcee with your eyes. You should have a job, something to do. You've too much energy to just sit around like this, Ted."

Ted sighed. At thirty-nine, he had retired. At sixteen, he'd thought he was the new Bellows, having facility with a brush and being no slouch

with the horsehide. The St. Paul Saints had shattered the baseball dream, and Ted's own objective self appraisal had killed the Bellows hope.

**H**E had turned to commercial art and had done extremely well from the start. At thirty-nine, he'd retired.

Now, he said, "I've been thinking of going to work."

"Painting again? Ted, really?"

"Not painting. I loathe painting. That's one reason I retired. Maybe I'll buy a cheap ball club."

"Ted," she said despairingly, "what's wrong with *work*?" She came over to take the deck chair next to his.

"Nothing," he said. "Unless it gets to be a disease. From the time I was sixteen until I was thirty-eight, I worked like three men. That's twenty-two years a man, and I've forty-four years of rest due me. If I'm alive, at eighty-three, I'll go back to work."

"Nobody," she said wearily, "can ever get any sense out of you." She looked down at the patio below. "Do you really think she's pretty, Ted?"

The blonde was now on her back.

"She has a fair figure. I haven't seen much of her face."

"I suppose," Ann said hesitantly, "I've failed you, somewhere."

"Well," Ted began.

But Ann rose hastily. "Heavens, I forgot I had soup on the stove." The screen door slammed behind her.

His eyes went to the blonde,

moved away, came back.

"Dreams, that's all you've got!"

Ted looked at the doorway, but it was vacant. He looked down at the patio below, but the blonde was quiescent. Besides, the voice had been closer.

And there was *nobody* in view. There was one small, scrubby squirrel looking at him from the base of the nutmeg tree. Squirrels don't talk.

Through the screen, Ted heard dimly the movements of Ann in the kitchen, and below, the blonde had her eyes closed. Nobody, nobody, nobody . . .

He said, "What do you mean, dreams?" and watched the squirrel closely.

"Don't be stupid," the voice said. The squirrel hadn't opened its mouth.

Ted rose, and looked through the screen door, but Ann was still in the kitchen, her back to him. Down on her patio, the blonde didn't stir.

Ted said, "I'll be damned."

"You're all damned," the voice said, "damned by your loyalties. Clean living is killing you. But you can dream."

Ted looked at the squirrel, who was looking at him. Ted sat down again in the deck chair. He asked, "What good's a dream?"

"What good's reality?" No movement of the squirrel's mouth, but a certain intentness in its gaze. "And how can you tell which is the dream? How will you ever know? How much do you know, anyway?"

"More than a squirrel. You don't even know how far it is from home plate to first base."

"Ninety feet. How far is it to Mars, Brain?"

"Thirty-five million miles — and more."

A silence. The squirrel walked around the base of the tree and came into view on the other side. It moved cautiously toward the porch, its bushy tail alert as a guidon. About halfway between the porch and the tree, it paused, sitting up on its haunches.

"Thirty-five million miles to Mars. Close your eyes, Truesdale!"

**T**ED obediently closed his eyes and saw a film of red. It could have been the sun through his eyelids. Then the redness faded and against a pink background a figure appeared.

It was the figure of a bearded, three-armed man, nailing some boards on what appeared to be a sluice. Beyond and above the bent figure, a green mountain towered, its peak topped with a polar cap. At the horizon end of the sluice, water was visible, flowing this way.

The man was big, with an enormous chest. Ted's own chest gasped for oxygen, and he had a sense of lightness, physical lightness.

The man drove in the last nail, and sat on a hummock, above the sluice, watching the water slowly work his way. Then he reached into a container at his side and pulled out—

Pulled out what could be nothing other than a skinned rat. Ted gagged, and the man looked up. He had a knife in one of his other hands now.

"Lunch?"

"Not a rat. I'll be hanged if I'll eat a rat."

"Who in the world asked you to eat a rat?"

Ted opened his eyes to see his wife standing in the doorway. He smiled at her, and turned to look at the squirrel. The squirrel was just disappearing up the nutmeg tree.

"I was dreaming," Ted said to his wife.

"And talking in your sleep."

"Was I?" He rose.

They went in to lunch.

It was probably an excellent meal; all of Ann's were. Ted didn't remember eating it; he kept seeing that pink background and the man with the rat. Mars? Undoubtedly. A dream? Well . . .

"That squirrel —" Mrs. Truesdale said.

"Squirrel?" Ted looked up hastily.

"He watches me dress. I've seen him, at the window. The one in the back yard, this morning."

"Pull the shade," Ted suggested.

"For a squirrel? Wouldn't I feel silly? It's so—so old maidish."

"That it is," Ted agreed. "I'll give it some thought this afternoon. Maybe something will come to me."

"Don't strain yourself dear," Ann said. "Didn't you get enough rest this morning?"

"I wasn't resting," Ted told her.

"I was considering various investments in my mind. There are a lot of arguments against buying a ball club, all right. It's a headache."

Ann shook her head. Then, "The Garden Club meets this afternoon. You won't be needing the car?"

"Not today. Do you remember our honeymoon, Ann? Remember Honolulu?"

"How could I ever forget it, Ted?" Her eyes were reminiscent. "Those flowers, those beautiful hibiscus and—"

Ted poured another cup of coffee.

WHEN Ann had left, and he went back to the porch, the blonde was just coming through the sliding glass door that led from her living room to the patio. The squirrel wasn't in sight.

The blonde looked up his way, and Ted smiled. He doubted if she could see a smile, at this distance, but it seemed presumptuous to wave.

Did she smile in return? He thought she did.

He sat down in the deck chair, and gave two minutes of thought to possible investments entailing a daily job. None appeared desirable.

At the age of twenty-two, before he became inured to them, Ted had been in love with a model. It had been a warm, bright, ecstatic affair, though it had ended with mutual relief. Since that time, there had been only Ann. And she'd been enough, at first. Before the home and garden obsession had engulfed her.

Now, Ted told himself, *I'm not an unreasonable man. I am a romantic, admittedly, and full of latent energy, but I have no natural Tom-cat inclinations.*

The blonde was reading. Looked like a novel, though it could have been a cook book or a text on hooked rugs. Probably a novel of romance. Her shoulders were bare and finely moulded, her chin line clean. He wondered about the color of her eyes.

From the other side of the nutmeg tree, the scrubby squirrel again came into view. At the base of the tree, it stood for a moment with its back to Ted, looking down at the blonde.

Then it turned and came over to inspect a weather-beaten golf ball near the sprinkler. Ted watched it closely.

"Well, traveler, what did you think of Mars?"

"Didn't see much of it," Ted answered.

"There's not much to see. Was that a dream?"

"Wasn't it?"

"Couldn't get your breath, could you? You *know* you were there, don't you?"

"No."

The squirrel sat down. "Difficult, aren't you? Why should I bother?"

Ted said nothing.

"She's a beautiful girl. Can't see why her husband would leave her."

Ted asked, "Who's a beautiful girl?"

The squirrel went over to nose the golf ball, again.

"I asked a question." Ted said.

The squirrel sat up, looking at the nutmeg tree. "Look, Mr. Truesdale, we've got to have a meeting of minds. You know who's a beautiful girl, and so do I. Good gosh, you've been sitting there, drooling, all morning. And now you're back for more." The bright black eyes turned Ted's way. "Don't be so conventional. That's what kept you from being a first rate artist."

Ted was silent.

"Do we do business? Or don't we?"

Ted said, "How can you talk without opening your mouth?"

"Talk? Squirrels can't talk, you fool."

"Well, how can you make yourself heard, then?"

"Do you have to pry, Truesdale? You're getting a break, as it is. Do you have to know *everything*?"

**T**EDE looked at his hands, and at the nutmeg tree. And back at the squirrel. A thirty-nine year old retired artist, sitting in the sun and talking to himself. What a jerk he was getting to be.

"Okay, I've been wrong before." The squirrel started for the tree.

"Wait!" Ted almost shouted.

From below, the blonde glanced his way, and he realized his voice had carried that far.

The squirrel waited; the blonde went back to her book.

"What," Ted asked hesitantly. "did you mean about doing business?"

"You and the blonde. Don't tell me you wouldn't like to get to know her."

Ted squirmed in his chair. "I — well, she's certainly lovely."

"Sure. I'll go down and sound her out. I'll keep in touch, Truesdale."

The squirrel went down the hill and hopped on the low, red brick wall that bordered the patio. The blonde looked up from her reading.

Was *she* talking to the squirrel? Her lips were moving.

Then she rose, and went into the house. When she came out again, she put some nuts on the low brick wall. And went back to her reading.

Ted watched for signs of further dialogue, but there were none. The squirrel came up the hill, the nuts bulging its cheeks. It didn't even glance at Ted as it went up the trunk of the tree.

The sun moved behind a cloud and a faint breeze came up from the west. Ted felt drowsy, but he kept his eyes open, waiting for the reappearance of the squirrel.

Nothing happened. Occasionally, the blonde would turn a page, but that was all. Ted went in and mixed himself a drink. Then he put some records on the record player and sat near the huge empty fireplace in the living room.

Why wasn't he happy? Fine home, fine view, money in the bank, neat, pretty wife, no job to fret about, nothing to do but improve his mind.

*Nuts*, he told himself. *Nothing to do but covet blondes, you mean. Don't give me that malarkey about*

*improving your mind.*

He rose, in protest, and picked out a volume of Spinoza from the shelves flanking the fireplace. He stayed with it for seven full minutes, and then mixed another drink.

At four-thirty, he was dozing in the leather chair in his study when Ann came in.

"You should see Dora's delphiniums," Ann said.

"Should I? How do you know I haven't?"

"Ted, you've been drinking." Her voice was not sharp, but soft, her attitude maternal.

"A little. I'd like some more. Why don't we go out to dinner, some place where we can dance?"

"Tonight? Have you forgotten the Drews are coming over?"

"I've been trying to. Couldn't you phone them?"

"Ted." She made two syllables out of it. She looked at him quietly. "Do they bore you terribly?"

"They do."

"And do I?"

"No. You should, but you don't. You've still a potential. Well, if the Drews are coming, I'd better shave."

She was looking at him thoughtfully as he left the room.

*Peak outer-thought*, "Well, Ha, what do you think of Earthians?"

"They're like us," Ha thought wonderingly, "except for that stuff growing on them."

"Hair," Peak explained. "They haven't our cloud blanket, and their climate is ridiculous. You've — been

*gone some time."*

"Had to case a lot of spots. I guess I've a fine prospect. I'm working on him. Having eyes was—wonderful again. But I had that—that hair on me, too."

"You'll get used to it. Ha, no mix-ups, now. We're all counting on you."

"It's a cinch."

FOR a certain class of people, Eben Drews would undoubtedly make a fascinating conversationalist. For that class of people who are engrossed in the elimination of aphids or the control of slugs. It was a class that lived without Ted.

Ted kept his eyes on Eben's face and managed a "What do you know about that?" at the proper intervals, but his mind was on the squirrel and the blonde. And the dream. Which was the dream? Here, listening to the Drews monologue or this morning, on Mars?

He had a strange feeling, as the monotone droned on and on, as the background of Ann and Mrs. Drews' voice seemed to swell and dim, that this was the dream.

As they were undressing, in the room between their bedrooms, later that evening, Ann said, "It won't happen again, honey. I see what you mean."

"Don't tell me they bored you, too?"

"A little. And I'm interested in gardening. Ted—" She seemed to be blushing.

"Yes?" In wonder and hope, he

gazed at her.

"Ted, I'll try to read—and—wid-en my interests. I'll be better."

Something warm grew in him.

"If you'll get a job."

The warmth receded. "Blackmail. Ann, you're incurable." He turned, and stalked off to his own bedroom. There, he sat on the bed and stared moodily at the wall, wondering about marriage.

When the light was out, he stood by his window a few seconds, looking down at the house below. All the windows were dark.

He was annoyed and frustrated and not a bit tired. But he was asleep five minutes after he hit the pillow. Just before he fell off, he thought he heard a scratching at the window.

There was an opalgent glow which seemed to come from the solid cloud barrier above. There was grass and a slope leading down to the stream. There was no sense of wonder in Ted.

Beyond the hills to his left, there seemed to be a darker area, as though there were cities, there, and their resultant smog. But this was—pastoral, peaceful and still invigorating.

Willows bordered the stream and along the bend there were trees which resembled cottonwoods, though the bark was darker. Ted breathed easily, and there was no change in his weight he could notice.

Then, in a glade, surrounded by the willows, he saw the blonde. The sun was not visible; there was just

the pearly glow. But she was sunning herself.

**I**F it was a dream, his senses were with him. He could feel the strong grass underfoot, smell the rich growth, hear the blood pounding in his temples. He walked down the hill toward the blonde.

He pushed through the willows and came into the glade, and saw her quick smile of recognition.

He smiled in return. "I won't believe it in the morning." He sat on the grass beside her. "Is it Venus?"

"Where else?" Her face was finely modeled with faintly discernible cheek bones and a smooth jaw line. "The lover's planet, hidden from the universe by its atmosphere. Hamilton's work, I'll wager."

"Hamilton?"

"You know him, our friend from the nutmeg tree. He arranged it, didn't he?"

"I suppose. He—or destiny. I shouldn't be here, really. Because I do love my wife, in a lot of ways, but —"

"Please don't say she doesn't understand you. She probably does. Most wives do."

"Well, yes. What I was going to say is that she isn't in sympathy with certain views I hold, and —"

"Do we have to rationalize? You wanted to be with me, and you are. You're with me, and we're alone. Unless you've brought your conscience?"

"Darling," he said "I'm an artist."

Her face was close now, her lips slightly parted. Her arms trembled around his neck. Her lips were warm and soft and seeking . . .

The opalescence grew to a soft brilliance, growing and ebbing, ebbing finally to a languid dusk. The smell of grass was like a violet mist and the willows sighed in envy.

"Aren't you ever going to get up, Ted?"

He looked up sleepily to see his wife standing in the doorway. Her dark hair was high off her neck and her pert face was freshly scrubbed. She wore a red, tailored dressing robe.

He said, "Red brings you to life, Ann. You should wear it oftener."

"Thank you. Buckwheat cakes and Canadian bacon, sleepy head." She came over to sit on the edge of his bed. "Ted—I probably worded that badly last night about the job, but —"

"But let's not talk about it before breakfast," he said quickly. "I'll be down in a few minutes."

"All right." She rose, and her voice changed. "All right." Her back was stiff, as she marched out.

In his bathroom, Ted studied himself in the mirror. His eyes were shadowed, his face wan. "You dog," he told his image, and smiled.

*El thought, "I wonder if Ha's had any success. I don't trust him, for some reason, dear."*

*"Ha's all right," Bee thought. "Inclined to whimsy, but generally sound. And he wants a body as bad-*

*ly as we do. But only Lust can give us one."*

*"We gave Ha a body. We projected him successfully."*

*"On Earth. Darling, you don't want to live on Earth."*

*"Why?"*

*"It's all city, like Valdora and Vellugia. They have no lover's country, like this. Would you like that, dearest?"*

*"No, no, no. We'll have to rely on Ha. I wonder what he's done."*

*"Working. And another thing, dearest, I wouldn't want you in any body but the one I loved."*

*"Sweet."*

*"Beloved."*

A CROSS the breakfast table, Ann's level scrutiny was annoying. Ted concentrated on the cakes and bacon.

He was just lighting a cigarette to go with his second cup of coffee, when he said, "What's the matter with you, this morning?"

The cigarette trembled very little. "Matter?"

"You seem so—oh, it would sound silly."

*"Let's have it, anyway."*

*"So—sort of—guilty."*

He picked up the cigarette before it burned the cloth. "What kind of—Well, I like that. Of all the silly observations!" He shook his head vexedly.

"Ted, why don't you look at me? Ted, you *did* go right to bed, last night?"

He looked at her, his chin tilted

pugnaciously. "No, I went to Venus and met a blonde. Of course I went to bed."

"Well, what are you so nervous about? Heavens, it wasn't that little spat we had, or *you* had, rather, about your going to work?"

"No, no, no. You're imagining things, Ann."

"Look at your hand. Look how it's trembling. Ted—what is the matter?"

"Nothing. I had a dream. Ann, I don't want to talk about it."

"Drinking," she said. "It's those drinks you had, yesterday, I'll bet. You're just not a drinking man, Theodore Truesdale, and you're too old to begin."

"I'm *not* old. You know I'm not old. You wish I were, but I'm not. Do we always have to quarrel?"

She didn't answer. Her lips quavered, but she didn't cry. She rose and carried a few dishes to the sink.

Ted went out to the porch with his coffee and cigarette. The view was unpopulated. Conscience, he told himself. My annoyance is an indication of it. Why should my conscience bother me because of a dream? Who can stop a dream?

There was a scratching sound from the other side of the nutmeg tree and the inverted head of Hamilton appeared about ten feet above the tree's base.

*"You don't look happy."*

Ted didn't answer.

Hamilton came down the remaining ten feet and went over to look at the geraniums. "Fine gardener,

your wife."

Ted ignored him.

"Good looking, too. Maybe she could dye her hair."

No words from Ted.

Hamilton looked down at the house below, and back at Ted. "Don't blame me for that Venus trip, Truesdale. You wanted it, but bad."

"I'm not blaming anybody for anything," Ted said. "Just because I had a dream."

"Dream? Why don't you go down and ask her if she had the same dream? What a man won't say to clear his conscience! Let go, Truesdale, enjoy yourself."

**B**ELOW, the blonde came out onto her patio. She was wearing white shorts and halter today. She looked Ted's way for seconds — and then waved.

Ted waved back.

"Beautiful morning," she called, and Ted answered, "It certainly is."

She picked up a book from the low table near her chaise lounge and settled.

Hamilton was sniffing the ice plant on the slope. "If the neighbors only knew —"

"There's nothing to know. She'd be less than human if she didn't say 'hello' after seeing me day after day."

"Not to mention one night."

"Oh, cut it out, drop it."

His wife appeared in the doorway. "Who in the world are you talking to?"

"Myself." He looked at her bleakly. "More quarreling about a job?"

"No." She came out onto the porch and settled in the chair beside him. "Ted, there's the squirrel. That's the one who's afflicted with— with voyeurism."

"Oh, Ann, for goodness sake."

"His nest is right up there, in the nutmeg tree. Ted, I want you to destroy it."

"Don't be childish."

"I'm not being childish. They eat young bark and buds and birds' eggs. They're evil things, Ted."

"I think they're cute."

"Cute. Without the tail, they're just another rat. How some people can eat them is beyond me."

The pinkness and the slue and the three-armed man with the enormous chest seemed to swim, for a moment, in Ted's memory. Hamilton went scurrying up the nutmeg tree.

"The little devil," Ann said.

Little devil? The devil, maybe? No, not Hamilton. Ted said, "No club meeting today? No garden, home, cooking, household management or knitting circle shindigs?"

"Not a one."

"Why don't we drive up the coast and eat out, tonight?"

"I'd love to, Ted. But I really have to finish that petit point for Dora's anniversary. I shouldn't be sitting here now, without it."

"You look very good without it. We could stop at Sweeney's."

Sweeney's had the finest sea food west of New Orleans. And the immortal Sweeney, himself, behind the bar.

"Don't tempt me," Ann said, and

rose. "Why don't you drive up the coast? You're restless."

"Maybe I will," he said. He tried to make it sound like an accusation, but it came out a flat, dull statement.

**A**FTER she'd gone into the house, he sat for a while, considering the blonde. He didn't even know her name, and still he . . . Well, why should he know her name? There wasn't much of her visible now; she had the raised section of the chaise lounge turned his way.

Hamilton was nowhere in sight.

He rose, after awhile, and went along the walk to the garage. He climbed into the convertible, started the motor, and unhooked the top, pressing the button to lower it.

Driving out into the sunlight, he reflected this was just pique; he wasn't going to enjoy it, alone. A man, he ruminated, might as well be single.

He drove along the winding coast road above Ynez Junction and parked there, with the whole, curving, hilly coast line spread out below him. The water was blue and calm with just a fringe of white where it lapped the beach.

It was a clear day, and he could see Venus plainly. He thought of last night and tried to make it a dream, a product of his wishful thinking, as were the dialogues with Hamilton.

Sitting around, going simple, that's what he'd been doing. Talking squirrels and trysts on Venus and a quick trip to Mars. Punchy, that's all. The

devil finds things for idle hands to . . .

No, it wasn't that; it was just day-dreaming. The devil had no part of this business. Nor had his idleness. A peeping-Tom, Hamilton might be, but no devil.

*"I think I can see," Peak thought! "Not much, but a dim mist. Lern, are you listening?"*

*"I'm listening. I guess Ha is working, all right. He's going to work on some others, too."*

*Peak outer-thought, "Have you considered our big problem, to keep Lust minor?"*

*"I believe I have it licked. It's an Earthian custom I've been studying, and it surely keeps its adherents in line. Lust wouldn't grow much under it."*

*"A custom?"*

*"Marriage of course. How do you feel about it?"*

*"It's—a desperate measure. It's a —"*

*"A desperate problem," Lern interposed. "True love can survive it, I'm sure. We don't want a repetition of the situation that forced us to kill Lust—and lose our bodies. Of course, yours is the final word."*

*"It—well, we'll try it. I just hope Ha keeps working. It would be just like that whimsical imp to get us half materialized and then leave us."*

*"Or what if something should happen to him, his spirit killed in some way?"*

*"We won't even inner-think that."*

**T**EDE drove down the curving, back rocky road to Sweeney's. It was a low-roofed building of cedar shales, with an open air dining room on piles above the water of the cove.

Ted stayed in the bar. He had French-fried shrimp and garlic bread and beer. And after that, some whiskey. And after that, some dialogue with Sweeney regarding the respective merits of Shahn and Albright. Ted knew very little about either of them, but Sweeney knew less so it was a satisfying discussion.

He drove home in a mood. He was remembering the Honolulu days with Ann, and the days and nights before that. What they'd had, they'd find again. There was a solution to it all, and not on Venus.

He came home to find a note on the kitchen table:

*Henri's in town and he insisted I visit the Blair's with him. He's just done over their place. Don't wait up.*

Henri was elegantly thin and fairly tall. An interior decorator with a modern bent. He'd done the Truesdale place three times.

If it were anyone but Ann, I'd be jealous, Ted thought. As it was, he felt only a grating annoyance. He poured a king-sized jolt of bourbon, added a trace of water and went into the study.

He didn't turn on the light. He sat in the dark and sipped the bourbon—and fell asleep . . .

The blonde had her hair up and was wearing a red jacket above a white flannel skirt. Her smile was the same as last night's, and pos-

sibly a shade warmer.

"How did you know I'd come?" he asked.

"I didn't, but a girl can hope. Bad day?"

"Oh—unsatisfactory. And yours?"

"Barren. Your wife's out to get Hamilton, isn't she?"

"I guess."

"Does she—suspect about us?"

"No." A pause, and, "Why did your husband leave you?"

"He didn't. I left him. Engineer, lived by the slide rule. Are you going to leave your wife?"

He didn't answer that. He pulled her close and buried his face in the bright hair. The violet mists and the smell of grass and the envious sigh of the willows. Why couldn't all life be like this? . . .

When he woke, again, dawn was coming through the study window. He rose wearily and stood near the glass door that led to the rear yard. On the wet grass, the morning quietness lay like a blanket. In the house below, he saw the shadowed, stretching figure of a woman behind a drawn shade. She, too, was awake.

Coincidence? And the rest an illusion? He'd always been more or less conventional; it was difficult to accept the super-conventional without reserve or rationalization.

**H**E climbed the stairs quietly, avoiding the fifth, which squeaked. In the bathroom, he studied his stubbled face as though it were the face of a stranger. Then he went into the bedroom and rumpled

the bed clothes.

She'd never believe he slept in the study; she'd never believe he'd been to Venus. For a moment he stood there, looking at the rumpled bed.

Then he went quietly through the dressing room and into her room.

She lay partially on her back, partially on her left side, her dark hair like ink against the clean white pillow, one slender tanned arm flung along the pillow's upper edge, her other arm bent, her cheek resting against the back of that hand.

There was just the breath of a smile on her full lips. What did she dream of, his Ann? Of porridge and pottery and poinsettias? Of schedules, menus, rotary floor waxers and blight elimination? Or didn't she dream, at all?

Wasn't there, somewhere, a dream they could share?

Her eyes opened, and she said, "Good morning. Just getting in?"

He shook his head. "I slept in the study. I rumpled the bed clothes in my room, but I really slept in the study."

"And why did you rumple the bed clothes?" She was awake and aware; it was one of her many attributes that she was bright from the opening of her eyes in the morning.

He said carefully, "I rumpled the bed clothes because I didn't think you'd believe I slept in the study. I thought you'd think I was out chasing blondes, or something."

She smiled, studying him, saying nothing.

"How were the Blairs? And how

was Henri?"

"The Blairs are more fun when you're along. Henri tried to kiss me." Her eyes awaited a reaction to that last.

"I'd try to kiss you, too, if I were Henri. Didn't you want him to?"

She frowned. "I—didn't. I don't—think I did. We have so many common interests and he *is* handsome. I must be sub-human."

"Maybe you're in love with me. The common interests would be flowers, food and interior decoration. If I were a girl, I wouldn't want to be kissed by a man who gave his life to that."

"Don't be superior. Henri's a man of many conquests, as any of my friends will admit when they're drunk. Ted. I don't usually like this kind of talk. Why am I talking like this?"

"Maybe you dreamed of Henri."

"Oh, Ted —" She slid her feet out, and sat up on the edge of the bed. "Do you think—with us, it was just—animal attraction?"

"It could have been. You were, and are, an attractive animal. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Some of the soundest marriages are founded on it."

"And maintained?"

"Founded and maintained. With a minor compromise, here and there. But no major ones. When are you going to see Henri again?"

"For lunch, here. And you'd better be home, Theodore Truesdale. I don't want to be one of those—those, well, one of them."

"I'll be here, glowering. I suppose, with the super gourmet as guest, you'll be working on the lunch all morning."

She shook her head. "I'm giving him hamburgers. It's a sort of test."

What was the change in her, this morning? Ted sensed it, but couldn't isolate it. And what had motivated it? Being with Henri?

*Peak thought, "I can smell, too, now. Ha, you've brought another subject up?"*

*"I'm going to have to. That Truesdale is getting conscience attacks. It seems to be an Earth trait. I've got an awful hot wire on the line, though. He could materialize us fast."*

*"Well, get him, get him. Or stir up Truesdale. Maybe you could alienate him from his wife and he'd spend more time here."*

*"I'm doing my best, sir. The situation is—muddled. The wife doesn't favor me at all."*

"Watch yourself. Be careful."

"That I will."

*In their glade, Bee outer-thought, "Darling, I can see! Ha didn't desert us. Sweetheart, Lust is wakening."*

*"I can't see, dearest. Are you going to materialize and not I? Beloved, if —"*

*"Calm yourself, darling. You ARE materializing. Not the senses, yet, perhaps, but I can see one leg of yours, one long, slim, lovely leg. Oh, beloved one —"*

*"This time, we'll be careful. Even if we — what is that word Peak used?"*

*"Marriage. We'll make it work. This isn't Earth."*

TED took a warm shower and a cool one. He towed himself vigorously, and put on shorts and a tee shirt. After breakfast, he would cut the lawn and clean out the garage and dig up the tulip bulbs. He'd had enough of sitting.

He cut the lawn and cleaned out the garage and dug up the tulip beds. He worked with a devout if subdued fury and was conscious of Ann's occasional wondering glance from the windows. He finished it all by ten-thirty.

He put the spade and lawn mower away, and donned a pair of sneakers. Then he went out into the backyard and looked up into the branches of the nutmeg tree.

He could see the nest, and it was attainable. He stood staring at it, trying to summon enough moral decision to take the first step. It would probably mean no more blonde. It . . .

Hamilton peered over the edge of his nest and it seemed to Ted he could almost see the apprehension in those black eyes. Hamilton scrambled out and came hurrying down, head first.

"Now what?"

"You're evil."

"I'm evil. Projection, huh? You're kind of mixed up, Truesdale. I wasn't with the blonde, last night."

"I'm not ready to believe I was either. But this—this evil can be mental."

"Your wife's been talking to you. What about her? What about this Henri?"

"What about him? You're treading on dangerous ground, you bushy-tailed rat."

"Am I? Henri likes the place. I've been showing it to him. And pointing out its advantages. No husbands to come home, unexpectedly." Hamilton paused. "He'll be up there, again. And with *whom*, Truesdale?"

"Not Ann. She's incorruptible, you devil."

"Sure, she is. So what are you worried about?"

From the back porch, Ann said, "Ted, what are you doing?"

He turned to face her, as did Hamilton. Ted said, "I was going to climb up and knock down that nest."

"Oh, forget it. It was a silly whim of mine, anyway. Look at him, Ted. He seems to be begging you."

"You don't know him," Ted said. "He fools us all."

"Oh, Ted, you've had too much sun this morning. Look at those bright, black eyes. He wants to be friends."

Hamilton sat up on his haunches, his front paws curled, looking from one to the other beseechingly.

Ted saw the quick moisture in Ann's eyes and said, "Well, it's your decision, then. It's your responsibility." He walked past her and into the house.

**H**E went up to his room. Projection . . . The little devil had

hit him with that one. Don't blame yourself, Ted Truesdale. Ann has too many unimportant interests; Ann's cold. How many lines of communication did he have to her, other than the physical? Had he tried to find enough points of intellectual contact?

When they were first married it was all art with Ann. Because he was an artist. When she'd discovered he was an artist who knew nothing of art, that had died. The home, then, and she'd made him a home to be proud of. Wasn't it the place he spent most of his time, sitting around? But, with these interests, Ann had grown. While he sat, she'd grown.

She'd grown beyond bars and dancing and small talk. She didn't realize it, herself, but she'd grown beyond him. The two bedrooms had been originally his idea, so he wouldn't waken her if he read late at night.

And when that wasn't sufficient to kill his yawning hours, he'd tried to come back along the single, physical line of communication. What else did he have to offer her?

He took another shower. He shaved and annointed his hair with perfumed oil. He wore his newest, trickiest slacks and an open-necked sport shirt. He'd been told he had an attractive neck.

Then he went down to lunch.

In the living room, in Ted's favorite chair near the fireplace, Henri sat, a drink in his hand.

Henri rose, a dark, dynamic fig-

ure. He said genially, "Well, Ted, old man, it's been some time."

"Not long enough for me to be an old man," Ted said. "How goes the newest campaign, Henri?"

Henri's smile was bland, his hand-clasp firm. "Slowly. No ill will, I hope, Ted?" Poise, assurance, the light touch.

"I'm not as modern as I should be, probably," Ted answered. "Been to Venus, lately?"

The drink wobbled in Henri's left hand. The poise, for a moment, was shattered. "Ven—Venice? In Italy, you mean?"

"In California. You're trembling, Henri. Your heart?"

"Heart —?" Blank, oafish stare, the poise scrambling to get back.

"At our age, we have to watch the ticker," Ted warned him. "What are you drinking?"

Henri stared at his nearly-empty glass. "Scotch—I—ah—"

"Sure thing. I'll have one with you." Ted went over to the liquor cabinet.

When he returned, with the pair of drinks, Ann was in the room. Ann said, "I could use one, myself."

Some of Henri's poise was back and all of his smile. "Mix her a strong one, Teddy boy. Build up her resistance."

Hamburger, Ann had called it, but it was like ambrosia. The talk flowed around Ted; food, fashion, furniture, flowers.

Henry was witty and articulate. Ann appreciative and responsive. Ted present.

All the things he'd read, and nothing to say. Mann he'd read, and Joyce. Shakespeare and Spinoza, Emerson, Shelley and . . .

And there was a lull momentarily in the conversation.

Ted said quickly, "I batted .314 at Houston. That's in the Texas League."

Ann stared at him, smiling. Henri stared at him, smirking. They went back to their discussion.

What weapons did he have? He sat there while the talk poured over him, turning into a wrathful midget, hating them both.

At two, he rose from the table, "I . . . have a golf date. Hate to leave you two alone."

"We'll try to get along, old boy," Henri said smilingly. "Keep your eye on the ball."

Ann said, "Easy at the nineteenth hole, honey." She lifted her lips for his kiss.

They were soft and cool.

He didn't have a golf date. He didn't want to leave them. But he couldn't sit there, growing smaller and duller by the minute. He was an artist and an athlete, not a worm.

**H**E drove to the country club, and sat at the bar. Pete Orcutt and Johnny Devlin came in about three-thirty, and they settled down in the card room to some canasta.

Pete said, "Henri's in town. Done the Blair's place for them."

"I know," Johnny said. "Thank heavens my mate's at the lake. How about yours, Pete?"

"In Denver, visiting her mother."

Ted said evenly, "Henri's sitting at my house, boring my wife to death, right now. I don't worry about Henri."

Pete coughed. Johnny studied his hand intently. Neither of them said a word.

The game went on. Ted had too many wild cards, or not enough. Nothing worked. He fed Johnny and got garbage from Pete. He drank and simmered and watched their scores pile up.

At five-thirty, he rose and said, "I don't mind losing to you guys, but you can't expect me to support you." He wrote out two checks.

"Bad loser," Pete said, winking at Johnny.

Johnny said, "We'll have to get some golf in, Ted. Give me a ring, any time. I'm a free man, for two weeks."

Ted nodded, and left.

It was six when he got home. There was another note

*Irma needed a fourth in a hurry and she sounded so desperate, and I knew you wouldn't mind. I might be late.*

XXX

A

He looked at the x's doubtfully. It wasn't like Ann to add symbolic kisses. He had enough whiskey in him so that it didn't seem improper to phone.

Irma answered.

"Hello, Irma. Is Ann there?"

"She is. Checking, Ted?"

"Of course not," he said stiffly.

"May I speak with her, please?"

Ann's voice. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Well, is Henri with you?"

"No. Why —?"

"Something kind of important's come up, and it's down his alley. Do you know where he is? What time did he leave here?"

"He left at two-thirty. Said he had to see the Blairs. Maybe you can get him there."

"Thanks, I'll try. Honey—I—ah, have a good game." He hung up.

Two-thirty. Well, that was all right. Half an hour after Ted had left. Half an hour, half an hour, half an hour . . . He poured a drink.

HALF an hour, half an hour, half an hour . . . He went out onto the porch. The blonde was on her patio, all dressed up in filmy green. Another blonde sat in the chair near her, male, with sport jacket and tanned face, with a drink in his hand.

Hamilton's work?

Hamilton came scrambling down the nutmeg tree. "Still hot?"

"Go away."

Hamilton looked down at the patio and back at Ted. "Her cousin from Milwaukee. Henri's making the trip, tonight."

"For the blonde?"

"Don't be naive."

"If you're inferring that my wife, my Ann is going —"

"I only said Henri's making the trip. Maybe, just in hope. But how in hell will you ever know? Unless you're there, yourself?"

"I'm not going anywhere," Ted said. "You can look for another stooge, Lucifer. I love my wife . . ."

For seconds, Hamilton stared at Ted with those beady, black eyes. Then, "You're serious, aren't you. You're leveling?"

"I'm serious."

Hamilton looked at the nutmeg tree. "Oh, Trusdale, if you knew the story. If you knew what this meant." He started up the tree, and paused. "Well, there are others, plenty of them." He went quickly up the rest of the way.

Ted didn't even glance at the blonde, again, before going back into the house. He put some Cole Porter on the record player and sat by the fireplace.

Honolulu and Houston and *Sweeney's* and the country club merged in his mind as the whiskey drowsiness started to creep through him. He couldn't go to sleep, not before Ann came home. He had some things to tell her.

Before she went to sleep.

Ann, Ann, thirty minutes, Ann, oh beloved darling . . .

The last record finished and shut off the machine. Ted dreamed of homering in the ninth, against Louisville, with the bases loaded.

He woke to a black room. Had Ann come in, not seen him in the living room, and gone to bed? Ann, no. Ann, be awake. Ann, you wouldn't like Venus—without me. I hope. Ann . . .

He stumbled out into the hall, and looked up the steps. No lights

there, either. He ran up the stairs, whimpering, and through the dressing room into her room. He snapped on the big overhead light.

She was asleep. Asleep—and smiling.

He was shaking her. He was sobbing, burying his wet face in her shoulder, trembling and incoherent.

"Ted, baby, what is the matter? What's happened, darling?"

He told her. Incoherently, but swiftly, holding her tightly all the while. From the first of Hamilton's words to the last. And finished with, "I've wanted you so badly, and you seemed so distant. I know there's no excusing me, but I want you to understand, to know how much I —"

He was silent, spent, weak as water.

She stroked his hair. She said. "Wanting me isn't enough, wasn't enough. Can't you see that, dearest? A woman must be needed, not wanted. Darling, everything's going to be all right, now."

"Ann, I haven't the right to ask. But—did I bring you back from—I mean, were you on Venus?"

She put a soft hand on his lips. "Sweetheart, what a horrible question. I'm your Ann, remember? I'm your darling. And nobody else is going to come between us. This will be our room, tonight, and all the nights."

*The now embodied assembly met above the stream they could hear, in the glade they could see.*

Ha said, "I've a request from

*Earthians, that Truesdale pair?"*

"Request?" Peak said.

"They'd like to spend the weekend, here, all their weekends. He works the rest of the week, but —"

"Earthians, here?" Peak interrupted. "I'll be darned if—"

Ha said, "Remember, if it wasn't for them, we'd still be disembodied. I

think this is a voting matter, Peak."

"Them? Him, you mean."

"Oh, no," Ha corrected. "She was here, too, that final night. Twice, as a matter of fact. The last time with her husband. I say they're fine people, and I'd be proud to welcome them."

And it was so voted.

THE END

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The graphic features the word "Letters" in a cursive script, with the first letter "L" being particularly large and decorative. This is positioned above a horizontal line of black dots. Below this, the words "from the" are written in a smaller, elegant script font. Another horizontal line of black dots follows. At the bottom, the word "Readers" is written in a large, bold, serif font, with the "R" matching the style of the "L" in "Letters". A final horizontal line of black dots completes the base of the graphic.

#### A COLLECTOR'S ITEM

Dear Ed:

I have just finished reading the April issue of *IMAGINATION*. Thanks. It is a genuine pleasure to read a magazine in which all the stories are excellent—and some even better than the others.

IN THIS SIGN . . . of course is No. 1. But BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST is a close second. The rest of the stories were all good. Of course I may be prejudiced about IN THIS SIGN . . . since I consider Bradbury as one of the greatest living writers.

The cover was beautiful, and the articles, especially FANDORA'S BOX, were excellent. This issue of Madge will probably become a collector's item for use in introducing sf to new readers. It contains excellent material of every known type of sf and fantasy except the "cowboy on the moon" which we can do without.

Please convey my personal congratulations to Mari Wolf for a job well done in her fan feature. And all in all, Mr. Hamling, I am glad you took over *IMAGINATION*. If you keep up like this you'll have them all on the run . . .

G. M. Carr  
3200 Harvard N.,  
Seattle 2, Wash.

*Thanks for the nice words, and as to the April issue we too thought it was exceptionally well balanced. We will try and make each issue even better . . . . . wlh*

### HE FOUND US AT LAST!

Dear Bill:

I'm an old friend of yours from "Amazing Stories" & "Fantastic Adventures". I just ran across the new magazine you edit. I was attracted to the April issue by Geoff St. Reynard's name on the cover. After reading his MISTRESS OF THE DJINN in FA (while you still edited the book) he has become one of my favorites.

Walter Hinton's great illo, however, sold me on the magazine. I might say the book looks like a digest size AS or FA and I hope you make it as great a magazine as those two. Can I get back issues of IMAGINATION?

On the backbone it gives the date and "Issue No. 4". What's that mean?

Alexander Fundukis  
629 W. 135th St.  
New York 31, N. Y.

*Glad to hear from you, Alex. The many friends we made while editing the Ziff-Davis magazines are all discovering IMAGINATION, and we're mighty happy about that. As to back issues, they're available to subscribers because we only have a limited quantity. So . . . As to the backbone, we thought it would be nice to number each book to make it easier to file in your collection. Most readers seem to favor the idea . . . wlh*

PUT ASIDE—WITH REGRET

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The April issue of Madge has been put reluctantly aside — reluctantly, for even though I have finished all the stories I still hate to let go of the magazine.

The cover was a beauty. If it's a photo-dyed print who posed for the original? More of this type.

As to the stories, I'm disappointed — that is, I couldn't find a single one I didn't like, not a one that I can't dissect coldly and gloatingly to point out the flaws.

As to the illos, Hinton's was by far the best. Tillotson was good too, but don't forget about Finlay. I agree with Jack Gaughan that Madge's headings are too pulpy. How about dressing up the departments a bit?

Everything in general about the magazine is excellent. But I'd like to see a few of my favorite authors in the book, such as Jack Vance, Leigh Brackett, Henry Kuttner, J. W. Pelkie, William L. Hamling, and L. Sprague de Camp. Can anything be done about this?

May IMAGINATION never abandon the idea of her title!

Robert Briney  
561 W. Western Ave.  
Muskegon, Mich.  
*We've got L. Sprague de Camp, Bob. As to the others, we'll see. And who's this writer Hamling you speak of? The name sounds familiar . . . We'll have to speak to the guy . . . wlh*

### NO LEMONS IN THIS ORCHARD!

Dear Ed:

You really hit the spot with your April issue. When I read BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST I thought you had a story that would be hard to beat. Then I read Bloch's HUNGRY HOUSE and — wonderful! These two easily were tops. Both

(Continued on Page 149)

# THE MISTAKE OF CHRISTOPHER

If someone told you the world was flat you'd laugh and call him a fool. But if he proved it—and you believed him—who'd have the last laugh?

THE man who discovered that the world was flat, after all, was an Australian hermit named Herbert Fitzgrone. He was a thoughtful man with a glass eye and a metal plate in his head, both obtained during the Boer War. In the bush shanty where he had lived for forty years, he studied the riddle of the universe.

One day, shortly after he had turned sixty, he made his astonishing discovery. He went to Sydney, and found his way to the office of the editor of the *Sydney Sun*. He opened the door and went in. "The world, sir," he said simply, "is flat."

Those historic words were the first inkling of the scientific storm that was to burst without warning on a complacently globular world. Unfortunately, the editor was not there to hear them. It was 11:00 A.M., Pacific time, and the Sydney pubs were open. Herbert Fitzgrone, a patient man to whom years were as seconds, sat down in the empty office to wait.

When the editor showed up at 4:35 P.M., he seemed a trifle confused. He hung his hat on Fitzgrone's head, and sat down in the waste paper basket. The man of science then stood erect and said it

again. "The world, sir, is flat."

"That so?" said the editor. "You know, I always had a secret hunch it was." He was an amiable man, with four children and a glass fountain pen that flashed a light in the top when he used it. At that moment he wasn't quite sure whether Herbert Fitzgrone was alone or at the head of a delegation.

"I expected you to scoff," Herbert Fitzgrone said, a shade of disappointment in his tone. "After all, when Columbus and Magellan said the world was round, everybody scoffed. I came here prepared to be scoffed at."

"I don't like to scoff at anybody," the editor said. "I once scoffed at a man in a pub, and he hit me in the eye."

"Well, if you won't," the scientist said, vexed, "you won't. Anyhow, I want to show you my proof that the earth as a globe is a monstrous impossibility. Look here." He spread out some sheets of paper on the editor's desk.

"My," said the editor. "Impressive, all right. What is it?"

"Trigonometry. Do you understand it?"

"No, but I'm very fond of it. All those big numbers and everything."

# COLUMBUS

*By Jules Archer*



Very impressive."

"Well, my calculations prove that the earth couldn't be a globe, because two lines of latitude can't possibly be at the same level. Do you realize what that means?"

"My God," said the editor in awe.

"Exactly! Suppose you had two ships in Sydney Harbor, one seven miles north of the other. According to the globular theory, the northern ship would also be four miles higher!"

The editor lurched in his swivel chair. "Stop the presses!" he yelled into the phone, as he had seen editors do in American films. "And get me the Hatson Line quickly!"

He waited for his connection. Then he said, "This is the editor of the *Sun*. Listen and listen carefully. Hold all sailings until further notice! I've just learned that the earth is flat! *Flat*, do you understand? God help the ships at sea!"

He hung up, wan and shaken. Then he rushed for the door to get the story on the presses. He was already through the door when he made the odd discovery that it wasn't the door. It was the window, it was open, and his office was on the ninth floor.

**N**OTHING more was heard of Herbert Fitzgrone after this tragedy. Presumably frightened that he might be held responsible for the editor's death, the scientist disappeared. Fortunately for posterity, however, he neglected to pick up the calculations he had spread out on

the editor's desk.

They were discovered by a vice-president of the Hatson Line, who came to the editor's office for further enlightenment. This gentleman made a prolonged study of the papers—he was quick on the trig and a fast man with a digit. He came to the terrifying conclusion that Christopher Columbus had made a terrible mistake.

He immediately cabled the New York office, forwarding all figures down to the last spherical triangle. The head of the New York office, a patriotic man, promptly dispatched the whole thing to the State Department in Washington, marked "Top Secret." Five minutes later Drew Pearson predicted darkly that the whole world would shortly find itself flat on its back.

The nation's top scientists were summoned to a secret and speedy conclave at the White House. The President put it squarely up to the scientists—was the world round, or wasn't it? And if it wasn't, what effect would a flat world have on the nation's defenses? Was this a boost for communism or democracy?

"Speak up, boys," he said. "I haven't got all day."

"Ridiculous, Mr. President," one scientist sneered. "If the world *is* flat, how do you explain that when you approach a mountain or ship at sea, you see first the summit or funnels?"

"What you see depends upon the weather," a young scientist insisted. "If there are low clouds, you don't

see the top first. Then again, what you see first often depends on what you *want* to see first! It's conditioning. Have you ever made a conscious effort to see the bottomis first?"

A little scientist with a high neck and a squint jumped up. "When a partial eclipse of the moon takes place, the shadow of the earth on the moon is a circle. Only a ball-shaped object can throw a circular shadow, gentlemen!"

"Poppycock!" scoffed a scientist next to him. "So can a flat disk. Furthermore, who is an authority here on what happens on the moon? Moon-gazing is guesswork, gentlemen—sheer guesswork!"

A worried little bald man pleaded, "Why can't we reconcile these hostile theories of apple-shape and saucer-shape into a compromise concept which will satisfy everybody?"

"Exactly!" a ribald voice shouted. "Apple-saucer!"

"Mr. Einstein?" said the President hopefully.

The great man rose wistfully. "I am sorry, Mr. President," he said meekly. "But it is all over my head."

"FLASH," said Walter Winchell on Sunday night. "Attention, Mr. and Mrs. America and all the ships at sea. I, Walter Winchell, want to tell you, whoever you are, that I, Walter Winchell, am the first as usual to break the most sensational scoop of the century! I, Walter Winchell, now tell you, whoever you are, that the world is no longer

round, but flat. Flat, ladies and gentlemen . . . F-L-A-T. Geography marches on! And the very first baby to be born into this new flat world . . ."

Hearst papers promptly informed their readers that: REDS SABOTAGE GLOBE! The *New York Times*, with eminent fairness, editorialized: "It would seem that there is a great deal of justification for the new theory that the world is flat, while on the other hand, it seems equally dubious that there is sufficient evidence for discarding the globular theory which has had, we cannot afford to overlook, the distinguished test of time."

Readers of the *Daily Worker* turned for the facts, as usual, to the *Herald Tribune*. The Communist Party suffered its usual crisis. One group contended that accepting the new theory would split the unity of the working class, diverting attention from the class struggle. The other group bitterly maintained that to adhere to the discredited globular theory would be a betrayal of Marx.

The latter lost. The result was a new splinter party called the True Marxists, which called a world rally to form the new popular front, the Flat World Workers Party. On the other side of the barricades, the N.A.M. and American Legion denounced flat-worldism as an attack on the very principles on which our great nation of free enterprise is founded.

Gabriel Heatter cried, "Ah, my friends, let's not be deceived! Let's

not be duped by this subtle attack on all that we hold dear, all that we have learned in the little red schoolhouse, in cherished days gone by!"

"This," Henry J. Taylor declared scathingly, "is the sort of thing we might have expected in the worst days of the New Deal. What actually lies behind this subversive campaign to convince Americans that the world is actually flat? Just this. Certain interests want you to believe that Columbus was wrong, that he made a mistake, when he said the world was round. If you swallow this, then you must believe his discovery of America was also a fantastic mistake. Is any decent American willing to concede that the founding of our great nation was nothing but a blunder?"

The Un-American Activities Committee immediately held hearings in Washington. Witnesses on all sides of the question were summoned. Among those who testified were Herbert Hoover, Gabriel Heatter, Henry J. Taylor, Thomas Dewey, Robert Taft, John Foster Dulles, Henry Luce, Gerald K. Smith, Representative Rankin, Louis Budenz, Whittaker Chambers, Elizabeth Dilling and Westbrook Pegler, who revealed that the whole thing was a plot by Mrs. Roosevelt. Henry Wallace was also called, cited for contempt in the first five minutes, and thereafter the proceedings went smoothly.

THE C.I.O. and the A.F. of L. held special conventions to con-

sider what stand labor should take on the issue. Since they felt it had little bearing on wages, hours or the Taft-Hartley Act, they passed a resolution to remain neutral. Or, as one delegate put it, to live in a world without shape.

A wave of unrest swept over the country. Teachers went on record in favor of a flat world, out of sheer boredom with trying to cram the opposite concept into the thick skulls of small fry. Shipping companies and airlines spent millions in paid advertising to fight the flat world idea. They feared that business would fall off if people got scared about doing the same.

Those who accepted the theory were stigmatized as "flatheads," and were exhorted in black ad headlines: "DON'T BE A FLATHEAD!" This led to the coining of the counter-epithet, "globephobe."

M.G.M. announced it would produce "The Flat Earth," made by the same hands who turned out "The Good Earth." Warner Brothers promptly purchased a vehicle called "One Globe" to star Humphrey Bogart as Columbus, Lauren Bacall as Queen Isabella, and Paul Muni as the *Santa Maria*.

The controversy spilled over into the United Nations. Russia, which discovered that it looked more imposing on flat maps, demanded that all globe maps be destroyed under a death penalty for non-compliance. The United States, out of habit, opposed this idea. Despite \$3,567,219, 483,128.50 rushed as a loan to Al-

bania, Iceland and 72 other nations, the U.N. vote went with the Soviet. As one Albanian grumbled, "They didn't send Chesterfields — just Wings."

Russia's victory had reverberations heard around the world . . . or rather, along the sides of the world. Old geographies were burned. Globe maps were broken in half and used for ashtrays. The flat map won the international distinction of being referred to as the Moscow map. Globetrotters were laid off by the lecture bureaus in droves. Universal Pictures had the plane in its trademark sky-write the company's name around a terrestrial saucer.

The world could not exist half round, half flat, the President of the United States told Congress sadly. And since the rest of the world was flat, there was no help for it — America would have to flatten out, too. Despite globephobe cries of "Shame!" the famous 22nd Amendment was added to the Constitution:

"The world shall, for all purposes of this Republic, be considered as flat. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation. Any article or any amendment which may contain any implication that the world is round is hereby nullified and repealed."

NOW that the world is once more flat, unified and serene, I do not think that there can be any serious consequences if I reveal the sequel to this historic development. It

came about when the editor of a national magazine, at his wit's end for a strong piece to follow his usual lead article of "Is Sex Here To Stay" or "How Sexy Are You Sexually?", hit upon the notion of sending me to Australia to find the man who had discovered the earth was flat.

It took me months of searching through the outback to locate Herbert Fitzgrone. He was still living in his bush shanty, and had just turned eighty when I found him. I had great difficulty in persuading him to tell me the whole story, as he was totally absorbed in a new scientific study. He was on the verge, he told me jubilantly, of proving that there is no such thing as gravity, and that Newton was an ass.

When I persisted in knowing more about his original research that had exploded the globular theory, he smiled dryly.

"Oh, *that!* Well, you probably know that I left all my calculations behind in that editor's office. When I came back here, I decided to work out a duplicate set. Well, sir, do you know what I discovered? That old Columbus had been right all along! I'd put the decimal point for the algebraic equation of one plane triangle in the wrong place."

"But that's impossible!" I burst out in horror. "Why, the whole world is flat now, as a result of your calculations!"

"You don't say," Herbert Fitzgrone chuckled. "Well, now!"

THE END

# WE'RE OFF TO MARS!

*By Carlton Firth*

The strange little robot machine would create anything Joe Linger wanted. The catch was, that he was being told what to create—and didn't know it!



Joe raised the strange robot globe and depressed the keys. Out on the plain a space ship came into being.

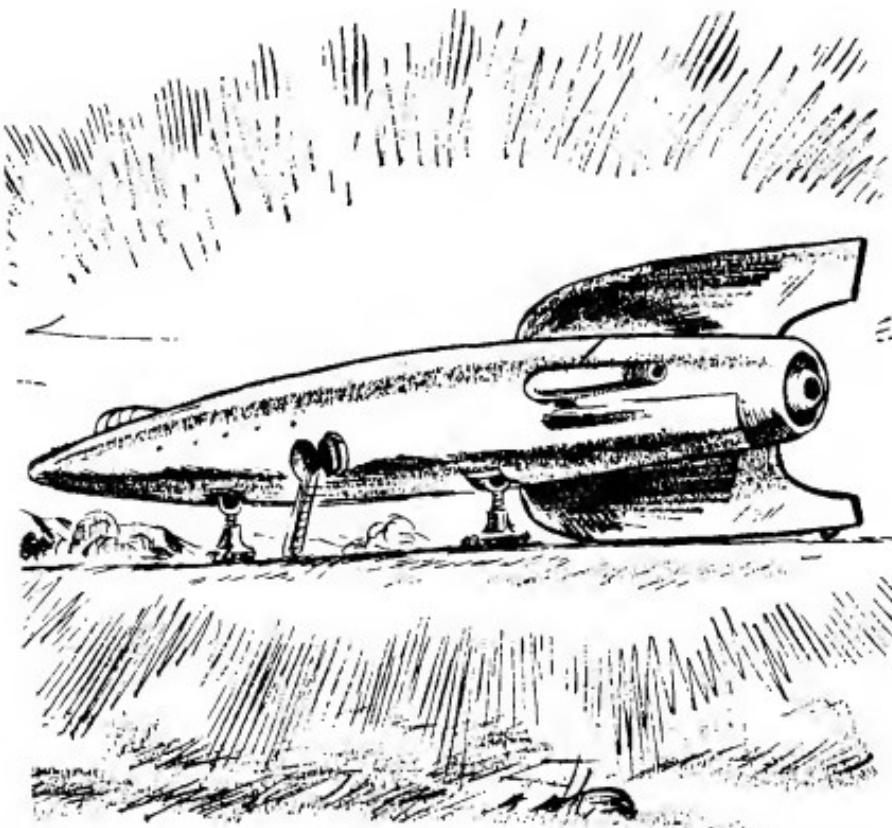
**J**OE Linger raised up on one elbow and stared at the door, frowning. "Who is it?" he called out.

A muffled voice answered from beyond the cracked, peeling wood. "Package for Mr. Joseph Linger!"

"Just a minute!" Joe laid his magazine aside, rolled to the edge of the bed, and pulled on his trousers. Rising, he poked his feet into frayed slippers and, walking to the

door, swung it open.

"Sign here, please!" A little, old man stood in the doorway. He held a large square package under one arm and extended the other, holding out a clipboard and pencil to Joe. He had a thatch of white hair and a red, wrinkled face with blue eyes and a scowl. He wore a loose, blue uniform with a cloth badge on his shallow chest, reading: *Time Deliveries, Inc.*



Joe took the clipboard and pencil, scrawled his name and frowned with sudden surprise.

The name on the clipboard list above his was: *Pontius Pilate, Rome, 12 A.D.*

And when he looked up at the scowling little man who was now holding the package out to him and extending a hand to receive back his clipboard and pencil, Joe saw that he was holding the package out with two right arms and reaching for the clipboard with two left arms!

Joe fell back a step. "Who in blazes *are* you?"

"Time Deliveries, Incorporated," the little man chanted. "We guarantee deliveries to anyone, anywhere, any time. Here's your package, Mr. Linger."

"B-but," Joe stammered, "where'd you *come* from?"

The little man lifted his lower left hand and fingered his pointed chin. A gleam entered his blue eyes. "Originally, I came from Ursula Major," he said. "That's 3428 A.D., by the present calendar. Now, do you accept this package or—"

"I—I accept!" Joe blurted, grabbing for the package. In his haste, he dropped the clipboard and pencil, but four hands deftly snatched them up before they hit the floor.

"Very well," said the little man. "Good day, Mr. Linger!" He stepped back into the hallway and pulled the door shut.

Joe stood frozen with the large

square package clutched to his chest. Then he lunged forward, wrenched at the doorknob, jerked the door open, and leaped out into the hall. "Hey-y-y-y!" his shout wavered off into weak dismay.

The hallway was empty.

**H**E reentered his room, closed and locked the door carefully, and walked over to his bed. His dazed eyes wandered to the window, to the dirty brick wall of the apartment house next door, to the shaft of blazing afternoon sunlight that struck the grimy windowpane. In broad daylight! *It had happened in broad daylight!*

He sat on the bed, staring at the package in his lap. It was a light, bulky package, wrapped in some silvery gray substance that felt colder and smoother than rubber—more like metal. On one side of the package was an inscription in large, bold script:

*To: Mr. Joseph Linger*

*June 27th, 1951, Dark Ages Earth  
24 Kens Street, Jersey City, N.J.  
United States, North America*

He wondered if it was a gag. But the little old man with four arms hadn't been a gag!

Finally, Joe opened the package. He merely inserted his thumb into a conspicuous slot at the corner and pushed it around the top edges. The silver-gray material parted easily and the lid came off the package. As it fell aside, he saw that the interior was filled with what resem-

bled a rubber sponge soaked in black lacquer. It was dry, springy, and blackly glistening. He clutched at it and pulled it out.

Only a top layer came out. Beneath that, surrounded with layers of the cushioning substance, was—something—and a folded sheet of glossy, white paper.

Joe took out the paper and read it.

*Mr. Joseph Linger  
June 27th, 1951, U.S.A.  
Dark Ages Earth  
Dear Mr. Linger:*

*We have chosen you to assist us in an important research project, because our investigation has found you to be a science fiction enthusiast. We believe you have a better chance of comprehending the scope of our research than would most people of your time.*

*As you may have suspected, time involves a countless number of varying probability universes, all coexisting in the same time dimension. It is much like a giant tree, with branches sprouting from the root—the very beginning of time—and subsequent branches sprouting from others; and so, on and on.*

*Our research teams have travelled successfully into the past. However, in attempting to return, they have been faced with innumerable branches in time-probability, with no way of determining which branch led to our universe!*

*Only a few have succeeded in returning—by recording the complete*

*facts of history as they went into the past, then stopping and checking those facts every few years on their return. When the facts didn't check, they knew they were off on another branch leading to another universe; they would back-track, try again, and check until they were on the right branch.*

*Even so, many members of our research teams died before they could return—and our average lifespan is five thousand years! You may understand, then, that this is an intolerable situation that needs correcting.*

*The purpose of this project is to determine the amount of probability stress which causes a branch in time, this allowing us to check back and spot every moment that such branches occur! With that, we can compute the moments of stress and the number of branches in all time-probability! Consequently, our research teams may then travel safely to any time-era, in any probability universe, with a yard-stick which can always lead them back to our own universe.*

*And so, in order to measure the probability stress which causes time-branching, we have decided to introduce such stress ourselves. Enclosed is a product of our civilization. You would probably call it a robot. It should never have existed in your time; therefore, it will induce considerable stress upon probability. A branch in time should result, if not when the robot arrives,*

*certainly when you make use of it. That, of course, is where you come in.*

*We have sent this robot because it will repay you many times over for your assistance in our project. We have scanners focused on your time, ready to record the branching and probability stress when it occurs. We ask only your cooperation. You may keep the robot, of course.*

*It will fashion any object you desire from surrounding matter—solid objects, air molecules, anything within a thousand yards of it—if you but type out the name and description of the desired object on its keyboard. Thus, if you wish an automobile, take the robot to a deserted road and type on its keyboard the word, "automobile." By influencing the sub-atomic forces of the dirt in the road, the empty air over the road, perhaps the grass along the side of the road, the robot will make you an automobile.*

*You may desire objects which do not exist in your time. If you type the word, "spaceship, for example, be sure to include a description of its performance, range, amount of supplies, etc.—and be on a large, open field when you do so.*

*In conclusion, it might be wise to remember that illegal possession of wealth in your time is punishable by law. I trust, for your own sake, you will exercise the utmost discretion. Sincerely,*

*Myytnor Skurle  
Director, Historial Research*

*Galactic Renaissance, Sol III*

JOE put the letter carefully on the bed beside him and reached into the box for the robot. He lifted it out. It was a shimmering, silver-gray globe, lighter than aluminum, with one side of it flattened to accommodate a keyboard. It was about the size of a bowling ball, he guessed. The keyboard had small push-buttons, lettered exactly like a typewriter, with a small glass lens above it. He struck the "J" key and a tiny, glowing "J" appeared in the center of the lens. He punched the tab marked "clear" at the top of the keyboard, and the "J" vanished.

His mind reeled at the implications of what he had read. Anything he wanted was his, merely by typing its name on this keyboard! Even objects he only imagined, which didn't even exist—spaceships, anti-gravity devices, *anything* . . .

His thoughts were confused. What did he want? Money? But what good was money when he wouldn't have to buy anything? What did he want?

He felt a sudden, overwhelming desire to confide in someone—to ask someone—

He rested the globe in his lap, clutching it with moist, slippery palms. His vision was blurred, his hands fumbling, as he pecked at the keyboard:

#### TELEPHONE

There was a swirling glow of

blue radiance, a faintly audible click from within the globe—then a loud, sharp *crack* and the smell of ozone!

A telephone rested on the bed beside him! Its black cord snaked across the floor to the baseboard beside the chipped dresser.

Joe relaxed with a shuddering sigh. He mopped at the sweat on his forehead with a wet palm—he had a telephone! The robot worked!

But did the telephone work? He reached over, lifted the receiver, and placed it to his ear. The dial-tone was unmistakable.

He replaced the receiver on its cradle and sat staring at the 'phone. Now that he had it, who would he call?

What did he *really* want?

He looked down at the robot in his lap and swallowed hesitantly. He had requested a telephone, so he got a telephone. But that wasn't what he wanted. He knew—the realization grew in his mind—what he really wanted, what any young guy would want, given the opportunity!

Feverishly, he clutched the robot in his lap and with a numb index finger, began pecking at the keyboard. He finished the phrase — then, hastily and with sudden apprehension, added a comma. His brow furrowed with intense concentration for a moment, then he resumed typing.

When he finished, the small, glowing letters beneath the lens

read:

A BEAUTIFUL GIRL,  
WHOM I CAN TRUST.

There was the swirling blue radiance, as before. He heard the faintly audible click from within the globe. His eyes shot around the room, expectantly. A vision flashed into his mind—a vision of the girl who would appear—young, with soft, dark hair tumbling to her shoulders, delicate features and a slender, lovely figure. A neat, immaculate suit would enhance her shapely curves. He waited . . . .

Nothing happened. No sharp crack, no smell of ozone. The robot had failed!

Joe sighed dismally. Resignedly, he steadied the robot in his lap and reached his thumb for the "clear" button. Then he saw it.

The tiny, glowing letters beneath the lens were different! The words he'd typed out were no longer there!

In their stead, he read:

DELAWARE 6-2717,  
ASK FOR BARBARA!

**H**E dialed the number.

"Hello?" a soft, feminine voice answered.

"Is this Barbara?" he asked.

"Yes. Who're you?"

"Joe Linger," he said. "Are you beautiful?"

"Why—I suppose so," came the modest answer. "What—"

"Can I trust you?" Joe persisted.

"Well, really!" she exclaimed.

"Mr. Linger, I'm afraid I don't know you—"

Joe groaned inwardly. Of course they were strangers! The robot couldn't help that!

"Just—just what is it you want?" the girl's voice stammered from the receiver.

"Nothing," Joe replied wearily. "Nothing, now. Maybe I'll call you back."

He hung up and sat staring into space.

Anything he wanted—anything! Money? What use was money when he didn't have to buy anything? Food? What about food? Meat and vegetables weren't inanimate objects, either.

He set the bright globe in his lap and placed his fingertips on its keyboard. Swiftly, he typed: SIRLOIN STEAK SMOTHERED IN ONIONS, GRAVY, MASHED POTATOES, ASPARAGUS, TOAST, COFFEE, APPLE PIE A LA MODE.

There came the shimmering blue radiance, the faint click, the sharp crack, and the smell of ozone.

Across the room, there was a battered writing table with a glass and a chipped china pitcher half-filled with stale water. Glass and pitcher vanished; instead, there sat the complete dinner, not only as he had ordered it but cooked to perfection. Complete with dishes, silverware, salt-and-pepper shakers, coffee cream, sugar bowl—everything.

After he had eaten, Joe settled

back and surveyed the dishes. How to get them washed? Furthermore, how to explain to Mrs. Haggerty, the landlady, that he had not been cooking in his room and what happened to her pitcher and glass?

He picked up the robot again and typed out: ONE PITCHER, ONE GLASS, BELONGING TO MRS. HAGGERTY.

With swirling blue radiance, faint click, sharp crack, and smell of ozone, the battered writing table resumed its former appearance.

Then he had his shoes changed into a cat. Afterwards, he had the cat changed back into new shoes. His two suits, brought out of the musty closet, were changed to brilliant, cloth-of-gold togas: then, because togas were hardly practical, he changed them back into new, expensive suits. With that beginning, he proceeded to rejuvenate his entire wardrobe. He began adding to it, acquiring some much-needed extra linen and some much-desired sportsclothes, but the process had to be reversed when he noticed the wallpaper was disappearing from the walls, the closet was minus its door, and the air in the room was beginning to reek with ozone. Mrs. Haggerty would never stand for that!

And by sheer accident, he learned how to control the robot's influence on surrounding matter. When he had concluded that shoes were a more practical possession than a cat, he had accidentally typed the phrase: SHOES FROM THE CAT.

And—with the glow, click, crack, and ozone smell—the cat had become a new pair of shoes. If he hadn't mentioned the cat, the robot might have jerked out one of the dresser drawers and made it into a pair of new shoes . . . .

He sat at the writing table, staring at the metal globe set before him. *It's like the Midas touch*, he mused reflectively. Old King Midas, sitting in his treasure rooms, watching gold coins dribble through his fingers; the old King had thought it would be wonderful if he could turn everything he touched into gold—until he could, and finally touched his young daughter—

**J**OE pushed back his chair, and walked over to the bed. He sat down and lifted the telephone receiver. Swiftly, he dialed the Delaware number.

"Hello?" It was the soft, feminine voice again.

"Barbara?" His tone was uncertain.

"Yes. Who's this?"

"Joe Linger," he said. "Barbara, I know you've never met me, but I don't know anyone else who can help me. I've got to talk to someone—maybe if I could talk to you, I'd be able to work things out? Could—could I come over to see you?"

"Well-l-l-l," she replied doubtfully, "I really don't—"

"Is someone else there?" he asked anxiously. "Someone else in the

family?"

"Do you want to speak to father?"

"Yes—please!"

"Just a minute—"

As he waited, Joe laid down the receiver and returned to the table for the robot. He brought it back to the bed, sat down, placed it in his lap, and swiftly typed out: BARBARA'S ADDRESS.

A gruff voice rattled faintly from the receiver. "Hello? Hello, who's this?"

There was a swirling blue glow and a click. Beneath the lens, at the top of the keyboard, was Barbara's address.

Joe picked up the receiver. "My name is Joe Linger," he said. "Sir, I don't know your name, but I thought I ought to see you. It's about something your daughter has become involved in without her knowledge. I thought you ought to know—"

"What?" The voice spoke sharply. "What're you talking about?"

"I'd rather not discuss it over the 'phone," Joe replied nervously. "Could I come over to see you, personally?"

"Why—um, ah—why, yes!" A hard edge crept into the voice. "Perhaps you'd better!"

Joe felt a wave of relief. "I'll be there in fifteen minutes," he promised.

He was five minutes early. He parked the sleek, yellow convertible in the driveway and climbed out.

He looked dapper and well-groomed in his dark, expensive suit as he went up the front steps and rang the doorbell. The round, gleaming globe of the robot was tucked under his arm.

The door was opened by a tall, stocky man with iron-gray hair. He raked Joe with a sharp, piercing gaze. "You're Mr. Linger?"

Joe nodded. "That's right. But I don't know your name."

"James Bowen," the man said stiffly. "Come in, Mr. Linger."

Joe hesitated, shook his head. "First, Mr. Bowen, I want to explain," he said. "I'm a stranger—your daughter has never met me—and yet, I was able to get her first name and telephone number. I thought you might like to know how I did that."

Bowen scowled darkly. "Well, please come in, Mr. Linger," he insisted stiffly. "We'll sit down and discuss the matter—"

"No," Joe refused, shaking his head again. "I want to show you something, first. I want you to see exactly what this is all about—" He cradled the robot in his arm and began typing on its keyboard, turning to face the driveway as he did so.

Bowen stepped out the door and stared at Joe's yellow convertible. Then he jerked back, startled.

There was a swirling blue glow from the bright globe, a faint click. And then—

*Crack!*

BOWEN grabbed at the door, his eyes bulging as he stared out at the driveway. Air currents swirled and eddied across the front lawn. The convertible had vanished.

"This globe is a robot mechanism," Joe said hastily. "It transmuted the metal atoms of that car into molecules of air. It can change any matter into any shape, form, or object desired! Watch!" Swiftly, he began typing again.

The swirling glow and sound effects were repeated.

And in the driveway, poised gracefully on its tricycle landing gear, was a small, gleaming light plane!

"I made that out of air molecules, too," Joe explained. "That is, the robot made it."

"Get—get that airplane off my driveway!" Bowen stammered hoarsely. "The neighbors will—"

Joe typed busily. The glow and noise repeated. The plane disappeared.

"Now you've seen it," Joe said quietly, gazing up at the tall, dazed man. "This is what I want to talk to you about. I—I need help, Mr. Bowen—"

"Come in," Bowen said weakly. "Come in—but turn that god-forsaken thing off!" He turned and walked back into the house. "Atomic bombs, hydrogen bombs—and now, this! And I'd always thought they'd have rocket ships first—"

Joe followed him in through a short foyer to a small, comfortable

living room. Then, in the living room doorway, he stopped. He felt the breath go out of him in a long sigh, and an excited fluttering in his chest.

Barbara Bowen stood across the room, beside the front window. She had heard the noises, had seen what happened. She was pale and frightened. And she was beautiful. Soft, dark hair framed a peach oval of a face with large gray eyes, short nose, and perfect lips. A soft blue housecoat draped over a smoothly curved, long-limbed figure.

Bowen had crossed the room and settled into a comfortable chair, taking out his pipe and tobacco pouch. "Sit down, Mr. Linger," he offered, with a gesture to a nearby chair. "This is my daughter, Barbara."

"Hello," Barbara said simply. Her voice was a soft, husky sound.

Joe merely swallowed and nodded, then crossed hurriedly to the preferred chair. Barbara sat down on the couch.

Then, haltingly at first, but with a constantly growing familiarity, Joe told them everything that had happened. He took the letter from Myytnor Skurle out of his pocket and showed it to them.

For several minutes after he finished, Mr. Bowen sat smoking his pipe and staring into space.

"Have you tried making money with it, Mr. Linger?" he asked, pensively.

"No," Joe admitted. "There

doesn't seem to be any need for me to have money."

Bowen rose with sudden decision and crossed to a low writing desk. He got a piece of paper and, after some searching, a small magnifying glass. Then he returned and laid the paper on the small coffee table. "There," he said. "Change that into some five-dollar bills."

Joe stared at the paper, frowning, then cradled the bright globe in his lap, and began typing. The usual effects followed.

The paper changed into four five-dollar bills.

Bowen picked them up and returned to the writing desk. He took out his wallet, extracted a five-dollar bill, and sat down. Carefully, he examined the robot's bills against his own.

MINUTES dragged past. Joe licked his lips nervously, noticed that Barbara was doing the same thing, and they stared at each other. Then Barbara smiled, and he smiled, and—

"Mr. Linger," Bowen spoke sharply, "I want you to do something else—no, wait!" He rose and walked back to them. "Mr. Linger, let me try that robot thing!"

Joe glanced at Barbara, then mutely handed the globe to Bowen.

"Now," Bowen said, turning, "Barbara, get off the couch, will you?"

"Yes, father!" Barbara rose hurriedly.

"Um," said Mr. Bowen. He cradled the globe on his arm and pecked at the keyboard.

There was the swirling blue glow, the faint click—and a loud *crack* that rattled the windows. The air swirled about the room, reeking with ozone—

And where the couch had been was now an ugly, anti-tank cannon, squatting heavily on its rubber tires.

"Holy cow!" Joe exclaimed, jumping to his feet.

"Uh *huh!*!" Bowen grunted, satisfied. He handed back the robot. "Now, if you please, Mr. Linger—give us back our couch! Can you?"

"Why—why, yes—" Joe stammered. He took the robot and changed Bowen's cannon back into the couch it had been.

"Uh *huh!*!" Bowen grunted again. He settled into his chair and resumed smoking his pipe, calmly.

Joe returned to his seat, frowning perplexedly. Barbara moved back toward the couch—then hesitated, staring at it uncertainly, and moved over toward Joe's chair. Almost without thinking, she perched herself on the arm of his chair. Joe slipped his arm around her hips to steady her, and neither of them seemed to notice their nearness. They sat staring at her father.

Bowen stared into space, nodded, and grunted a few times. Finally, he cleared his throat and began speaking.

"Mr. Linger, the bills that robot

made are perfect. You couldn't spot one of 'em for a counterfeit in a million years! And we've just discovered that not only will the robot make weapons, but anyone can work it—not just you! That puts a pretty serious light on the business. I'm thoroughly convinced, young man, that with that robot of yours, any man could become the ruler of the world!"

Joe gasped faintly. "That—that hadn't occurred to me!" he stammered weakly.

Bowen smiled at him with warm friendliness. "I didn't think it had," he said quietly. "But I'm afraid we're going to have to face facts. Joe, your life isn't going to be worth a plugged nickel if this ever gets out. Why, the moment you handed me that robot, I could've committed the perfect murder—by *changing you into a statue!*"

Joe shook his head. "The robot can't influence animate objects," he protested.

"Didn't you make a cat?" Bowen asked sharply.

Joe gulped nervously. *Yes, he had!* And he'd changed the cat back into new shoes—

"You mustn't deny the danger for a minute, Joe," Bowen went on, gravely. "If ever the wrong people hear about that robot and get their hands on it, you're as good as dead! And the rest of the world will shortly be under the killer's thumb—"

"Father—" Barbara blurted im-

pulsively. "Father, can't we—help him, somehow?"

Bowen raised his brows and grinned at his daughter. "Maybe for your sake, we'd better!" he exclaimed, chuckling.

Barbara fidgetted with embarrassment.

"I've been wondering about the people who sent the robot to you," Bowen resumed seriously. "But it seems that they weren't interested so much in what the robot might do to our world as they were in getting their experiment done. So this seems to be left entirely in your hands, Joe." He glanced up, his gray eyes boring into Joe's face. "Do you want to make your own decision about it, or do you want us to make a suggestion?"

Joe ran his fingers through his hair, nervously. "I'd—I'd appreciate anything you say, Mr. Bowen! Anything!"

But in the back of his mind—even as Bowen began speaking again—Joe felt the beginnings of an idea, a decision that formed and grew and flooded into his whole being with the exhilaration of a drug! Even as Bowen began speaking, Joe knew what he was going to do—what he *had* to do—

THE yellow convertible swung up over a shoulder and down the winding dirt road into a narrow valley. Ahead lay a small lake.

"Your summer cabin's on the south shore, you say?" Joe asked.

tooling the big car down into the cool, tree-shaded lowland.

Bowen nodded, beside him. "I still think you ought to let me put my oxygen torch to that thing."

Joe grinned and slowed the car, whipping it off the road into a small clearing. A small, weatherbeaten cabin stood back among the pines. Beyond the clearing was the sandy shore and the lake.

"There's our cabin," Barbara acknowledged, as Joe headed the car toward it. He parked under the trees and they got out. He carried the bright globe under his arm.

"Well," Bowen said, facing him, "We're here, now. What is it you plan to do, Joe?"

Joe nodded toward the clearing. "I think I'd better do it out there," he said.

"It's wonderful up here on weekends," Barbara remarked, matching stride with them as they started toward the clearing. She was wearing brief shorts and a sweater, with a bright kerchief tied around her head. "There's swimming and fishing and no one to bother us. Father's always wished he could build a home up here—"

Joe stopped, turning to her father. "Have you?"

Bowen nodded, frowning. "Always wanted a quiet, little place for the day I retire—"

"Just a minute, then!" Joe faced back toward the cabin and steadied the robot. Deftly, he began typing: SMALL HOUSE FROM CABIN

## FOR MR. BOWEN, ALL CONVENiences, FURNISHED.

There was the blue glow and faint click from the globe—then, a thunderous crash from the trees! A strong gust of wind whipped waves across the mirror-surface of the lake.

It was a small, white stucco house, with a low, rock wall extending around a garden in front. Bright flowers bloomed in the garden, vines climbed the trellises at the little windows. The roof was bright red tile. Bowen stared back at it, his face tight, his gray eyes misting.

"There," Joe said kindly. "That should fix you up."

"I—I didn't ask for it!" Bowen protested stubbornly. "I didn't earn it!"

"Oh, but you will!" Joe grinned brightly. "You're going to earn it by not telling anyone about what I'm going to do out here!" Chuckling softly, he turned and trudged on out toward the clearing.

Barbara caught up with him and tugged at his arm. "Joe," she pleaded. "Please, Joe! Don't do anything you'll be sorry for—"

Then they stopped at the clearing's edge. Joe cradled the robot on his arm, touched his fingers to the keyboard—and paused, silent for a moment. "I'll never be sorry for doing this!" he said, finally, and began typing.

ONE minute, there was the small clearing, green grass waving

gently in the warm afternoon sunshine. Then the very heavens seemed to split open and a giant thunderbolt came hurtling into the ground. The concussion almost knocked them off their feet.

And the next minute—

It was a long, silvery, torpedo-shaped hull, completely filling the small clearing. Rocket tubes jutted from its tapering tail; narrow fins creased its smooth flanks. A round airlock door stood open, waiting.

"A—*A rocket ship!*" Bowen gasped.

"More than that!" Joe was grinning as he moved out toward the open airlock. "She's equipped with water and air purifying devices and food synthesis tanks that'll supply one man as long as ten years! She has antigravity equipment that can lift her right off the Earth—and a rocket drive that'll accelerate to a velocity of two hundred and seventy-eight miles per second! That's roughly a million miles an hour! That means I can reach Mars' orbit in just over thirty hours!"

"But—but what're you going to do with it?" Barbara stammered.

"Do?" Joe leaped into the airlock, his robot clutched under his arm, and faced them with a laugh. "I'm going to the only place I'll be safe, Barbara! And I'll find out who built the canals on Mars! And what mysteries lie below the cloud-blanket of Venus! And whether any of the moons of Jupiter are inhabitable—"

"Y-you mean," Bowen sputtered, "you're *going into space?*"

Barbara shook her head. "But—not alone!"

A shadow flicked across Joe's young features. Then he grinned easily. "Why not? I'm no longer safe among men—"

"But you *can't* go alone!" she stormed. "You—Father! *I'm going with him!*"

"Barbara!" Bowen shouted. "What on earth—"

"Not on earth!" she cried, leaping forward. She landed in the narrow airlock, thrusting Joe back into its metal confines. She whirled back to her father, grabbing the door's levers to steady herself. "Not for long!" she added breathlessly. "Don't you see, father? He has to go—but he *can't go alone!* Someone has to be with him, to take care of him, to see that he eats his meals and—and I'm going with him! Goodbye, father! We'll—we'll be back!"

And tugging, panting, she swung the heavy door closed. It swung flush into the smooth, metal hull.

James Bowen stood transfixed, on the edge of the clearing. Behind him was the small, white house with the red roof and the little garden in front, as he watched the sleek, torpedo-shaped spaceship rise effortlessly from the ground and go skimming across the lake, climbing higher and higher until it dwindled to a silvery speck in the clear blue sky and vanished.

Then Bowen's face suddenly took on a new cast. There was a grim, satisfied light in his eyes as he followed the faint vapor trail up into the heavens. Slowly he reached a hand in his coat pocket. From it he withdrew a small metallic object. It was shaped oddly like a pocket radio, but of a more advanced and intricate design.

He depressed a small switch and the object glowed. About him there was the snap and crackle of powerful electrical forces. Bowen's voice suddenly sounded.

"Myytnor Skurle reporting to Headquarters on project Time Stress."

There was a blue crackle in the air about him. Then a distant voice intoned: "What is your report?"

He stared up at the sky, smiling, now. "I have personally seen Joe Linger on his way. My daughter accompanies him on the experiment. She will remain with the Earthman for his lifetime, keeping us informed as events progress. I believe she is attracted to him—however, that is a side issue, the main project having been successfully executed. Shall I return to Sol III?"

Again the blue crackle. "Our compliments, Myytnor Skurle. You may return."

The crackle faded and he made a further adjustment on the object he held. The smile was still on his face as he gazed into the sky after the space ship—and vanished . . . .

# FANTASY FILM FLASHES

By Forrest J. Ackerman

THE HOTTEST NEWS in the realm of scienti-celluloid is the production which, when released, will threaten to melt the screen with its solar spectacle. According to a personal interview with Dr. Albert De Pina, co-author of the Geo. Moskov production, it will have "adult dialogue, excellent characterization, tremendous sets—and a feeling of authenticity. It is a present day plot about a scientific miracle entirely possible of achievement." Robert Donat or Frederic March are likely leads for the role of the scientist whose autobiography is dramatized in—I CONQUER THE SUN! Watch this magazine for an advance foto feature.

*Invaders from the Moon*, alas, sounds like class A corn, the kind that every true fan will scorn—and the public will eat up. Gangsters, yet, steal a spaceship built by a crooked scientist! Threaten to blow up Wall Street from the Moon with atomic (rather than tommy) guns. The heroes of the farce turn out to be a couple of well known comedians.

*Thunder from the Stars*, on the other hand, sounds more like the real McCoy. A futuristic space-travel story by Stanhope Green, to be produced in England in the spring.

Time-travel is the seldom seen screen theme of "Berkeley Square", a famous play filmed once before which this time will star Tyrone Power Modernized, it will present Power as an atomic physicist who is chronported to an earlier era. The picture will be, provocatively, titled

*Beyond Time & Space*.

Dickering is on as I write this for film rights to the sensational Scully book, "Behind the Flying Saucers".

Geo. Jessel at 20th Fox sees musicomedy possibilities in L. Ron Hubbard's fantasy novel, "Slaves of Sleep".

False alarm: *Red Snow* is not the famous F. Wright Moxelyarn about the end of mankind, even tho (to add to coincidences) man name of Hubbard is scripting it. It's about Soviet menace in Alaska. Alas, we went thru all this once before, when MGM filmed *Red Dust*, which fans identified with the Murray Leinster classic, but which was a torrid tale of the tropics starring Jean Harlow.

Hubbard's dianetics-tinged "accident prone" book, "Death's Deputy", which is being translated there, has also been suggested for filming in France, a country which has produced a number of scientifilms and fantasies in the past, among them *Sidereal Cruises* (space-time travel) *The End of the World* (by cometary collision), *Liliom* (life after death), "*I Accuse!*" (return of the dead, currently being revived) and *The Machine to Predict Tomorrow*.

A strange, long-titled machine film is *The Machine to Kill Bad People*, an Italian product scheduled for importation. This may possibly be the Gaston Leroux book, "The Machine to Kill", which interests director Fritz Lang for American cinemadaptation. Already imported and showing at art cinemas is *Rita*, a French fantasy. *God, Man and Devil* may be seen where Yiddish

films are shown, and you may be able to catch the supernatural *Dybbuk* on one of its fairly frequent revivals.

Robots revolt on the screen in *The Day the World Trembled*, with Victor Mature in the role of an automaton.

**T**HE late Edgar Rice Burroughs will be perpetuated by a series based on his *Jungle Girl*. There's to be a *Tarzan and the Golden Lion*; and *Tarzan's Peril*, the next of his immortal ape-man series, is in technicolor. And speaking of immortality, an "Ole Doc Methuselah" adventure—*Plague*, by Rene Lafayette—has been optioned.

A ghostory scheduled for screening, to star comedian Jack Haley, is *Mrs. Candy and Saturday Nite*. A ghostory being re-released is *Earthbound*; you'll find it playing 'round coupled with Spencer Tracy in *Dante's Inferno*.

**J**UST IMAGINE, the 1930 scientifilmusicomedy of rocket flight to Mars in 1980, has been taken out of the vault, dusted off and given a critical screening for consideration as a revival.

Leprechauns will leap about in *Three Wishes*, a Disney project, also *Finian's Rainbow*.

The sequel to *Francis* (the talking mule), *Francis Goes to the Races*, may have a sequel: *Francis Goes to Washington*.

A highly respected name in radio fantasy, Arch Oboler, has produced an original science fiction script, filmed it, and it's turned out to be a "sleeper". The title is *FIXE*—about the last handful of human beings alive after the Atom. Other pictures concerning themselves with disasters to humanity include *Run for the Hills* (which will treat the H-bomb threat humorously); *Seven*

*Days Till Noon*, a British-made suspense story about atomic menace to London; the variously titled *Eleventh Hour*, *One Minute to Twelve* and/or *The Gates of Hell*, an Atomigeddon film from Denmark which is to be dubbed into English; David Bradley's *No Place to Hide*; *The Big Eye*; and, of course, the biggest and best of them all—the Balmer & Wylie masterpiece. **WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE**, which Paramount is at last bringing to the screen (in technicolor) after owning the property 19 years. A great outdoor rocket ramp, for the launching of the Noah's Ark of Space at the climax of the picture, has been built in one of the suburban areas of Los Angeles.

A tip to Paramount (copies of this feature are going to all major Studios and top producers): High-grade your files and you'll find you own a fancy flock of sciencfilm material, including MPShiel's "Purple Cloud", an original called "50 Years from Now", HG Wells' "Food of the Gods" and "The Island of Dr. Moreau", and the robot classic, "RUR". Get busy and let's see some of these produced! Also, how about a revival of *Dr. Cyclops*?

Universal-International—you could profit by the production of Edwin Balmer's "Billionaire", Philip Wylie's "Murderer Invisible", Abner J. Gelula's "Automaton" and other science fiction titles you long ago bought and forgot.

The Old Master, Jules Verne, will have his day on the screen with *Isle of Korda*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *A Journey to the Center of the Earth* (but try to stretch that onto a marquee!).

The New Master, Ray Bradbury, has scripted his Collier's and Dimension X success, *To the Future*, for filming as a television release.

## IMAGINATION

Video version, for visual purposes, will have more action laid in the future. And here's a weird one, if you can imagine it: Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* will be worked into a Bdwy musical play—! *The Kid from Mars*, by Oscar (former stf editor) Friend, is another musi-comedy natural.

**A** LONG the macabre line we have *Queen of Spades* currently playing; *A Gentleman from America*, by Michael Arlen to be filmed; *Two Bottles of Relish*; and 4 storiettes from John Collier's *Presenting Moonshine*, forthcoming.

You'll get a bang out of the Bing Crosby film, *Mr. Music*, with its casual acceptance of science-fantasy. During the course of the picture 5 fantasy magazines are seen lying around in Der Bingle's penthouse: fictitious issues of *Fantastic Stories*, *Amazing Stories* and *Startling Stories*, and seemingly real issues of *Planet* and *Weird*. Obviously all the movie needed to make it better than ever was to display the crooner enjoying a copy of IMAGINATION! Incidentally, on the subject of cinema celebrities and scientifiction, did you know that John Payne is a thorogoing fan? It has also been reported to me that Wm. Holden and Richard Basehart, and "Doodles" Weaver of the Spike Jones band, share our "affliction".

On the docket is an "A" film without a rocket even tho titled *Destination Unknown*. It's been scripted by the well known magazine author (of "Silver Plague," "Star Guardsman", etc: Albert De Pina) and is described as a "semi-documentary fantasy". It will be produced in technicolor by the same producer whose "Champagne for Caesar" rated orchids in LIFE. *Destination Unknown* climaxes in a

lost world where modern descendants of prehistoric monsters roam wild.

In fact, there is a spate of prehistoric pictures scheduled. The grand-daddy of 'em all, THE LOST WORLD, is to be re-filmed. This time the Conan Doyle classic (a silent c. '26) will, naturally, be in sound; additionally, in color . . . If you missed *One Million BC*, its monsters fight again in *Two Lost Worlds* . . . When this is published, *Prehistoric Women* may already be playing your neighborhood theater . . . I don't think this title will ever wind up on a marquee without a change, but *Last of the Labyrinthians* is another antediluvian survival story that's been announced for filming . . . Lippert will produce *Lost Continent* . . . Lastly, RKO is contemplating *Land of the Mist* as a successor to *Mighty Joe Young* (the successor to *King Kong*, for those whose memories stretch back that far).

Opportunity knocks twice via television for those who missed many fantastic films of the past. Recent revivals have included *It Happened Tomorrow* (adapted from a Lord Dunsany story), *The Crime of Dr. Crespi* (Poe), *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (Wells), *Death from a Distance*, *The Phantom Empire* and several others.

LOST HORIZON, the Utopian film that introduced Shangri-La into the language, has been announced for a new version.

There's a *Road to Mars* planned—not featuring Dorothy Lamour in a Martian sarong.

A comedy about a fabric that never wears out is to be made in England. Title, • *The Man in the White Suit*. You might not suspect it so I'll tell you that behind the title *The Perfect Woman* lies an amusing English importation about

a female automaton. (Of course the title itself, "The **PERFECT Woman**", should tip you at once to the fact that it could be nothing else but a *fantasy*.) The British have also sent us *The Rocking Horse Winner*, a supernormal story by Lady Chatterly's Lover—DHLawrence. Some distributor should import their scientifilm, *Once in a New Moon*, before it's old enough to be half-seen on squintavision,

Monogram has *Flight to Mars*.

A man dies, is interviewed by the devil for admittance to Hell—sound vaguely familiar? You may remember seeing it in '43 as *Heaven Can Wait*. It's going to be remade as *Meet Me in Washington Square*.

**H**ELL seems to be a hot subject right now, for Columbia is releasing a tour of Lucifer's demesgne in *Faust and the Devil*.

RKO, being very secretive about it, has shot "a realistic fantasy along political lines." Title, *The Man He Found*.

Albert De Pina has turned into script form the prophetic book, *Mission Accomplished*.

There's a *Lady in Space* and a *Lady from Venus* scheduled. Also a *Man from Mars* and a *Spaceship to Saturn!*

And a *Dead Planet!*

Bela (Dracula) Lugosi is seeking a suitable fantasy medium for a return to the screen.

*The Medium* will be filmed in Italy.

Riding the scientifilm wave, *El Moderno Barba Azul*, a Spanish made comedy, is being shown in specialized houses. It's worth catching for laughs, as "the modern Bluebeard" takes off in a rocket for the Moon!

Ed Gross, who produced Philip Wylie's *Gladiator*, and *Snuffy*

*Smith's Rocket Ship*, is searching about for something else scientificational to film. Such as Abbott & Costello "Destination Moonbeam" or an invulnerable man story (he stops bullets, speeding cars and ladies' hearts) for Eddie Albert.

A scientifilm is suspected in Warner Bros.' secrecy shrouded *Project No. 7*.

So well received at the 8th World Science Fiction Convention were the showings of the special films *Monsters of the Moon*, *The Sorcerer*, and *Raketenflug zum Mond*, that these pictures will possibly be re-shown for the fans who attend this year's science fiction convention in New Orleans.

*Hollywood—Land of the Zombie* and *New York Fantasy* are two exceptional short subjects filmed with the miracle camera of the famous Weegee. By all means catch them if you can.

The French are filming the Anatole France classic, *Penguin Island* . . . Disney plans to produce a Robt. Nathan fantasy, *The Woodcutter's House* . . . With parts of *Destination Moon* props, Geo. Pal made up a short advertising reel called *Destination Achievement*, but unfortunately only salesmen of a certain alcoholic beverage get to (hic) see it! Along the same line, the Packard people have put out a commercial short, *Men from Mars*.

Son-of-a-gun if a *Son of Dr. Jekyll* isn't scheduled after all these years! Are you revolving in your grave, Bob Stevenson? And my heart bleeds for HG Wells when Abbott & Costello Meet the Invisible Man.

*Professor Hagg's Private Planet*, a British book about an atomic scientist who creates an artificial satellite and thru it controls the Earth, has been optioned by Ida

Lupino.

Howard Hawks has a scientifilm up his sleeve by Wm. Faulkner, winner of the Nobel Award in Literature for '49. Plot concerns a planeteer who comes here from a far advanced civilization to advise Earth on vital matters. Just what *The Man from Planet X* is up to will be revealed in another visitor-from-the-void film which has been rushed to completion to compete with THE THING - from - another - world (nee "Who Goes There?")

The Film Classic Releasing Corp. intends to augment its revivals with some new pictures, at least one of which will be an sf plot. "Suicide Satellite" by Weaver Wright & Wensdayne Mondelle is under consideration, as is Ed Earl Rapp's "The Stellar Missiles."

From the anthology ADVENTURES IN TIME & SPACE, 20th Fox has bought the memorable *Farewell to the Master* by Harry Bates, original editor of Astounding.

AND, lastly, but far from leastly, a stellar array of stories is under consideration for filming by Hollywood. They include: Selections from the Shasta collection of shorts

by Murray Leinster, *Sidewise in Time*; *The Man Who Sold the Moon* (and others) by Heinlein; Bob Olsen's *Master of Mystery*; *Four-Sided Triangle* by Wm. Temple (a tremendous human interest suspense-story with a dual role that could win an Oscar for Jane Wyman or Anne Baxter); *Nerves*, by Lester del Rey; *Mars is Heaven* by Bradbury (it's already been printed, reprinted, re-reprinted, translated and aired a total of 15 times . . . why not a 16th time on the screen?); originals by Ken Crossen and Weaver Wright, both about Venus; *The Fox Woman* by A. Merritt; originals by Beaumont & Erman about 4-dimensional robberies, crime machines, visitors from other planets, etc; *The Murder of the USA* by Will Jenkins; and—even the thought that it's being contemplated is fantastic, for its proper presentation would make a monumental scientifilm—THE WORLD BELOW, by S. Fowler Wright!

At last the screen is waking up to the fascination of the sort of fiction that fills these pages, to the box office appeal of pictures that grip the imagination.

THE END

### WATCH FOR:-

**THE OWL AND THE APE** by L. Sprague De Camp



**RUN, LITTLE MONSTER!** by Chester S. Geier



**RETURN ENGAGEMENT** by Margaret St. Clair



Only the best science-fiction stories appear in IMAGINATION. Be sure and reserve your copy of the great November issue at your newsdealer now. On sale the first week in September.



## *Conducted by Mari Wolf*

TODAY, as I write this, the Eighth World Science Fiction Convention is nine months in the past, and the Ninth is three months in the future. For you reading this, it's a lot closer than that. The date—Labor Day Weekend, 1951. The place—New Orleans. The event—the Nolacon, where you'll see every fan that can possibly make it down there.

It's a little hard to describe just what goes on at a science fiction convention, because there's always so much happening. It's like a big family reunion. There are the fans who somehow manage to get to all the conventions, and can talk knowingly about the Torcon and the Cinecon. There are the fans who've never been to anything but their local club meetings before, wandering around wide-eyed the first day or two. I think maybe they have the most fun of all, or maybe I just think that because last year's Norwescon was my first and I had such a wonderful time being wide-eyed

myself.

There are the pro writers and editors, some of whom have come clear across the country to attend. They usually wind up on the speakers' platform, where the local committee has corralled them into giving talks on their work and the future of science fiction.

Then there's the auction. That's always the chance of a lifetime to get original illustrations and covers by your favorite stf artists and maybe a draft of a manuscript by a favorite author. Every year the editors of the different stf magazines donate covers and illustrations to be auctioned off, the proceeds to go toward paying for the Convention. So the auction plays a double role. It pays the major part of expenses and gives the fan collectors a chance to get material they couldn't get any other way.

There's always a fan art auction too, where originals from the different fanzines change hands. And it's all exciting to watch. You start

out just looking, but pretty soon you find your own hand waving in the air, making a bid . . .

You'll find that all sorts of memories stand out about your first Convention. (Probably about all the later ones too, but I haven't experienced them yet.) Exchanging signatures in the Convention booklets, and finding out that you've just got Doc Smith's without realizing who he was and feeling a thrill about it. Luncheon with a mixed group of fans and pros, trying to hear everything going on at once, and really needing four ears at least. Talking things over with your own group of Los Angelinos—Rick Sneary, Stan Woolston, Forrest J. Ackerman, E. E. Evans. The late-at-night gabfests that probably prevented all the non-fan occupants of the hotel from getting any sleep at all, and the desperate, "Please won't you be a little more quiet?" requests from the house detective . . .

Going to see *Destination Moon* with four hundred fans and Rog Phillips . . . (I don't know if there have been any other Convention romances. As far as I know, fans usually find their wives or husbands in less Conventional ways.)

**A**NYWAY, those are memories from last year. This year? there'll undoubtedly be a lot more. The New Orleans Science-Fantasy Society is getting ready to make this one of the best and biggest Conventions ever. They've been working hard all year lining up a program, finding a site for the Nolacon, and going through all the work that lies behind any successful get-together of this sort.

If you can possibly make it down to New Orleans this Labor Day Weekend plan to do so. Whether you're a member of organized fan-

dom or not. If you like science fiction and fantasy you'll enjoy the Nolacon. And you'll meet a lot of people with similar interests.

All you have to do to attend is join the Nolacon Committee. You'll probably want to do that anyway, even if you can't make it. Membership is only a dollar, and I don't know how you could get better value for your money. Membership in the Committee brings you a membership card, program booklet, and at least three pre-convention progress reports on how everything is shaping up in New Orleans. Besides, of course, entitling you to attend the Nolacon itself. And your dollar is working to support the Convention and give a boost to fandom in general.

The Nolacon is sponsored by the New Orleans Science-Fantasy Society, one of the largest and most active of the Southern fan clubs. I have here a card from Harry B. Moore, the committee chairman, with some information about the Nolacon I'd like to pass on to you. Here it is, in part:

"If you buy Science Fiction or Fantasy magazines regularly, or prefer this material to other types . . .

"This is YOUR convention—plan to attend.

"Everyone here will want to meet you; we always want to meet others with like tastes—we fans are that way . . .

"Dr. E. E. Smith, Stan Mullen and E. E. Evans are already booked for the program. Mack Reynolds, Fred Brown and Walt Sheldon are coming also . . ."

Harry Moore also listed a lot of others who plan to come if they can make it: Will Jenkins, Nelson Bond, Robert Bloch, George O. Smith, Anthony Boucher, Bea Ma-

haffey, Lloyd Eshbach. So you see it'll be quite a gathering.

One thing that's being included on the program will be quite controversial, I'm sure. That's Dianetics. The New Orleans group has gone in heavily on Dianetics ever since the book first came out, and they're planning to devote a portion of the Convention time to a practical Dianetics session. I personally can't see the connection between Dianetics and science fiction, nor what place it has in a science fiction Convention. But for those that want it, it'll be there. For those that don't—well, you can skip it as easily as not . . .

Anyway, as the New Orleans Science-Fantasy Society says, there will be a wonderful time to be had in New Orleans this Labor Day Weekend. Besides the events already listed, there'll be a panel discussion about science fiction and fandom. And Lilith Lorraine will give a talk on the cultural effect of stf that promises to be really good. About science fiction without a BEM lurking behind every tree and leering at the party gal... Though those stories are science fiction too . . .

Anyhow, Harry tells me that all money is to be sent to him, and I guess if you want any more information about the Nolacon he's the one to write to. So send in your dollar to Harry B. Moore, 2703 Camp St., New Orleans 13, La. And come along to the St. Charles Hotel and the Nolacon.

Hope I see you there!

Now on to some current fanzines:

\* \* \*

**FANFARE:** bimonthly; 15c; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Rd., N. Tonawanda, New York. Here's a fanzine with some really good fan

fiction. In fact, looking at the January '51 issue with its six short stories, I can't pick out a favorite. They're all good. Though maybe Del Close's quick moving little story, "Fair Exchange," hit me the hardest.

This is a big zine, 45 pages. Excellent mimeoing and some very good art work by Bradley.

A lot of the young fan writers write regularly for Fan-Fare. You'll probably be seeing some of their work in the pro-mags one of these days too, if they keep it up. Writers like Al Leverentz, Tony Duane and Andrew Duane. (Brothers?)

So if you want to read some good fan fiction, send 15c to W. Paul Ganley and see how the fans are doing with their typewriters these days.

\* \* \*

**FANTASY-TIMES:** twice a month; 10c; 12/\$1.00; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, New York. The leading newszine covering everything of special interest to fans. It brings you news of what's going on in the science fiction fantasy world almost as soon as it happens. News about pro markets and writers and new magazines on the stands and new science fiction movies and radio shows. News about prominent fans and activities in fandom. You'll find just about everything you want to know about the field covered in Fantasy-Times. Once you've read an issue of fandom's newspaper, you won't want to be without it.

\* \* \*

**FAN-VETS:** monthly; Ray Van Houten, 127 Spring St., Paterson 3, New Jersey. This is the news-sheet devoted to the interests of the fantasy fan in the U. S. Arm-

ed Services. In the last Fandora's Box I ran a report about the Fan-Vet convention. By the time you read this, that convention will be over, and the money raised through the auction will be used to send both pro magazines and fanzines to overseas fans who couldn't get them any other way.

Up to now the cost of printing and distributing Fan-Vet has been defrayed by Fandom House, publishers of Fantasy-Times. However, costs are mounting up—postage alone is a big expense. So if you'd like to help overseas fans and also receive news about their doing, send \$1.00 to Ray Van Houten. It will be put to good use.

\* \* \*

**SHANGRI-LA:** 15c; Helene Mears; 1340 West 4th. St., Los Angeles 17, California. This is the fanzine put out by the Los Angeles Science-Fantasy Society, with a different editor or editors for each issue. The January '51 issue is co-edited by Rory Faulkner and Alan Hershey and has some very good material in it.

Alan Hershey's article, "On the Value of an Opinion," is thought-provoking, to say the least. He first shows how the individual's opinions are molded to a large extent by his cultural pattern. He then takes the present-day shift of opinion away from the attitudes we have held in the past, toward new attitudes and new values, and shows how they affect the health of our culture. And how the very fact of the atom bomb's existence somehow attacks the very value of opinion itself . . . He ends by pointing out that sort of mass opinion should prevent the race from final self-destruction . . . Optimistic . . .

In a different vein, there's A. J.

Cox's article about Clifford Simak and Rory Faulkner's Hiawatha metered verse Homeland, which persists in running through my head . . . Darn it!

\* \* \*

**SCIENCE FICTION WEAKLY;** price?; Alan H. Pesetsky, 1475 Townsend Ave., New York 52, New York. A humorous newsheet put out by three Queens fans—Pesetsky, Morton Paley and Joel Markman. The January 1st. issue covers quite a few current events(?) —the bombing of Will Sykora's house, a bookburning session, and fandom's war against North Korea. Written straight too, or so you might think if you didn't look behind the puns.

\* \* \*

Well, that's all the fanzines for now. There'll be more next time. Remember, if you have a fanzine you'd like reviewed, send it to me—Mari Wolf, Fandora's Box, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill.

If you have any important fan news to give, or any special activities your group is planning to put on, write in and let the readers of IMAGINATION know about it. Or if there's anything about fans or fandom you'd like discussed here, write in about that, too.

Fandora's Box is *your* column, whether you're an old-time fan or someone just learning how interesting science fiction and fantasy can be. We want to have something in the Box for everyone.

Right now it's time to close up until the next issue. So, so long till I hear from you. Or till you hear from me.

And once again, I hope I see you at the Nolacon!

# Letters From The Readers

(Continued from Page 119)

Matheson and Russell turned in neat little yarns. As a matter of fact there wasn't a lemon in the whole issue which is really something. I usually find one good story in any issue of any other magazine.

Your cover was perfect for your type of publication. Malcolm Smith is to be congratulated. I do hope that your magazine will lean more toward fantasy. We have too many stf books on the stands now.

As to the artwork I agree with Gaughan. In the current issue only Hinton's illo was good. Artwork in the field has been my pet peeve for a long time. Oh yes, will you announce that I have old magazines for sale. I'll be glad to mail a list to any fan.

Don Douglas  
2036 Maycrest

So. Pasadena, Cal.

*You'll find plenty of top fantasy in Madge, Don. And of course, the best in science-fiction too. And even an occasional shocker ala the Matheson story . . . wlh*

## NO LETTER SECTION?

Dear Bill:

Where's the letter column for the April issue? Only four letters! Don't you know that many readers prefer letter columns?

IMAGINATION is a great magazine; its innovations have been watched with envy, but let's please expand the Reader department!

Francis M. Mulford  
512 Linwood Ave.  
Buffalo, N. Y.

*We'll bet the June issue was a pleas-*

*ant surprise with its eight solid pages of letters. And what about this issue? If we keep it up we'll have to dispense with the stories! And that would never do, now would it? . . . . . wlh*

## A GOOD FAN FEATURE

Dear Bill:

Just a few words to tell you how much I liked the April issue of Madge. Nice balance, and good writers.

Bob Krepps' story was of particular interest to me because he was working on it when he was out here last fall. I must say the finished story was excellent.

I like your new feature, FANDORA'S BOX. As science-fiction becomes more and more popular more people will become interested in the inner-world of fandom. And it is through columns such as this that new readers will become active science-fiction fans. It is quite fitting that Mari Wolf, a fan herself, should write it. I might add that it was most flattering to be quoted as an authority. Though I would like to stress that fans work together at all times and that's why we have our Conventions and Fan Federations, etc.

Oh yes, would you mind reassuring me that Rog Phillips isn't Hal Annas? I had an amazing dream the other night to that effect . . .

Rick Sneary

2962 Santa Ana St.  
South Gate N-58, Cal.

*What were you smoking to get such a pipe dream, Rick? Hal Annas hails*

from *Suffolk, Virginia*, and everyone knows that *Rog* is a Titan! . . . wlh

### HE WANTS BETTER MOVIES

Dear Ed:

Madge has always been a good magazine, but since you took over it is even better. In the April issue I liked Bob Krepps' (Geoff St. Reynard) story, *BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST* even though I guessed the ending in the middle of the yarn. Bob has lots of talent as witness the yarns you ran of his in FA.

The Bradbury story was well done, as always with the old master.

Hal Annas is a terrific humor-satirist. This story by him, *THE LONGSNOZZLE EVENT* really hit the spot. I'm still laughing!

**DRINK MY RED BLOOD . . .** I want my mommy! The good Matheson tradition of subtle horror.

Your feature, *HOLLYWOOD WAKES UP!* prompts me to write the following: There are many sci-enti-films scheduled by the film companies that should be confined to the furnace. A monstrosity currently playing downtown is *THE MAN FROM PLANET X*. Then there's the case of John Campbell's "Who Goes There" that the film industry has turned into *THE THING*. There is no resemblance whatsoever to the original story.

The attitude of most non-initiates to stf seems toward the old concepts of rocket ships, space pirates, and monsters from outer space. These movies are not going to be of any help in changing that view.

Anthony Lauria, Jr.

873 E. 181 St.  
New York 60, N. Y.

We have to disagree with you on one film you mention, Tony. We happened to see a private showing of *THE*

*THING* here in Chicago prior to release. We were very much impressed with it. Sure it was different from the story. But for our money it made a better picture than the story would have. Look back on the yarn; how could you successfully film it from an stf standpoint? In *THE THING* you've got suspense and drama and terror. Sure you've got a monster that looks a little like the monster in "Frankenstein", but the way it was filmed had us on the edge of our chair. We plan to see it again. It is one of the best jobs Hollywood has ever turned out from an stf standpoint. We heartily recommend it to everyone . . . However, we'll agree with you that the majority of Hollywood stf films are not what they should be. But give the movie town time. They'll catch on eventually. *THE THING*, we feel, is a good beginning . . . wlh

### MADGE IS DRESSED UP!

Dear Ed:

Beginning with the cover, I like IMAGINATION as a unit. Woman-like, there are points I don't care for in stories. It's like buying a dress; the waist line is too long, or the hips a bit snug, but there's plenty of room to let it out . . . and so on. I like the dress, but a few alterations could be made.

In *BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST* the idea was an excellent one; the setting however and vocabulary of the hero seemed incongruous to me. Somehow I can't see Bear-Throat, the tree dweller, describing lichens "from mauve to sanguine". He "had never seen or heard of anyone carving deliberate designs . . ." "the effect was lovely, albeit startling." Yet, glass is thin frozen water; a hand shake is mystifying; a month is a moon change;

cave cat; mating rug. Not objecting to the words themselves, but in Ahmusk they seemed inconsistent and out of character. A race that held the memory of abstract terms would not have forgotten concrete tool names.

**IN THIS SIGN...** As usual Bradbury does it. An entertaining story for those who want action, an underlying philosophy for those who want *more*.

I didn't like **THE LONGSNOZZLE EVENT**. I don't think Len Zitts is clever or amusing or anything but dull. I'm sorry too, because Hal Annas seems like a nice chap from his letter in the back.

**DRINK MY RED BLOOD...** was eerie, fascinating, pitiful. Decidedly I vote for more Matheson.

**AFTERNOON OF A FAHN** was delightful. **THE HUNGRY HOUSE**, not quite. And I'm not sure why, for Bloch has talent. The proper bones are there but the word flesh is cold.

**NOT IN THE RULES** had Reynolds twisting a sprig of rue to come up with a lover's knot. Good tight plotting with a humorous tongue-twisting like a chaw of Climax in the cheek.

**AN EEL BY THE TAIL** was the disjointed cousin of the mythological glass snake. It doesn't hang together for me.

There, that does it for now.

Alice Bullock

812 Gildersleeve  
Santa Fe, New Mex.

You have a technical point in the vocabulary Ahmusk seemed to wield. However, the effect was one of classic richness and I believe we can safely say it was better than having him say anything like: "Ugh! Me heap big warrior!"

This sprig of rue and chaw of climax in the cheek is fascinating.

Huh? . . . . . wh

### HE HAD TO LET US KNOW!

Dear Bill:

After seeing my first copy of "Madge", the April issue, I've decided to break a long, customary silence and let you know how much I've enjoyed your magazine. Although I've never found it necessary to write to an editor before, Madge was such a pleasant surprise to me that I had to let you know.

I haven't read the issue completely yet, but Hal Annas' little yarn is one of the best pieces of fresh, wacky humor that I've run across in the past five years . . . That type of humor is all too rare so it is doubly appreciated. Let's have more of Annas—Len Zitts should prove to be a very popular series character.

I hope to see more TOFFEE stories in your magazine also. I notice in the letter column that you've already run one. Myers is a very worthy successor to Thorne Smith and should become very popular with your readers. I remember when you ran TOFFEE yarns in FA Myers was attacked by some as an imitator of Thorne Smith's style, an attitude I could never agree with. There is no reason why Smith's carefree humor should pass on with him and Myers should be congratulated for taking up the torch and carrying on the grand tradition.

Richard Matheson's short was also excellent. Matheson has the ability to build up an atmosphere in his works which rivals Lovecraft.

About the only fault I can find with Madge is the artwork. None of the illos are actually bad, matter of fact Hinton's illo for BTFF was very good, but the general quality is below the standard set by an otherwise wonderful magazine. As Jack

Gaughan says, more care should be taken as all your artists are capable of excellent work.

You really have a swell magazine and you can count on me as a steady reader as long as the quality even approaches that of this issue.

Tom Campana  
18 Jefferson Ave.  
Cresskill, N. J.

*Approach it, Tom? Watch coming issues—the sky's the limit! . . . wlh*

### A GREAT DISCOVERY

Dear Ed:

I have just recently been introduced to a new medium in reading pleasure, namely, science-fiction. After exhausting the supply of hard cover books I was at a loss, literally starving, until that great day when I discovered "Madge".

If BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST is any indication as to the quality of forthcoming stories I won't want to miss any!

Mack Reynolds is now one of my favorite authors—and I've read only one of his stories!

Please give Richard Matheson some rope, maybe he'll hang himself.

Eric Frank Russell "fahned" my thought pattern in a story I truly enjoyed. Although these stories are very good, how is it that the "Old Masters" of science-fiction are not around? That has me stumped.

Well, I'm no makron, I've said more than I want to, but I look forward with keen interest to the next copy of my favorite magazine.

Walter Bell  
26 Delroy Drive  
Etobicoke, Ontario  
Canada

*Welcome into the fold, Walt. We're glad you like Madge so well, but just what old masters are you referring to? . . . . . wlh*

### STF READERS ARE UNIQUE

Dear Ed:

Congratulations on the best issue of Madge so far. The April cover was wonderful and the story, BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST was even better. Try and get some more fiction by St. Reynard. His THE USURPERS in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES was a classic of science-fiction.

Bob Bloch's novelette THE HUNGRY HOUSE was very good. As to the shorts, IN THIS SIGN . . . by Bradbury was wonderful. I didn't at all like THE LONGSNOZZLE EVENT. Surely Hal Annas can do better than that. DRINK MY RED BLOOD . . . by Richard Matheson was mere trash. His "Born of Man and Woman" was wonderful, and I was expecting something really good. This was horrible.

AFTERNOON OF A FAHN was really good and I enjoyed every moment of it. NOT IN THE RULES was perfect and deserves a sequel. AN EEL BY THE TAIL was boring. And the letter department was much too short.

You know, it's really remarkable the way fans stick together in stf. In no other field of literature is this true where the readers form fan clubs, write to the editors and each other, print their own fanzines, and hold conventions. I think we can be pretty proud of science-fiction. Pretty proud.

Robert Dennis McNamara  
50 Plaza St.  
Brooklyn 17, N. Y.

*Speaking of THE USURPERS, Bob, we're pleased to report that we have the sequel in the house—written expressly for us—a novel! Wait till you read it! And also, Mack Reynolds has written a sequel to NOT IN*

*THE RULES which you'll like too.  
How's that for service?*

*As to stf fans, you hit it on the head. We're all proud to be members of such a wonderful following.*  
...wlh

### DIANETICS—NO FRAUD . . . ?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I don't know who is responsible for that article on page 139 of the June issue of IMAGINATION, but here goes with both barrels.

Dianetics may not be a science, and it may be a bad art, but it works! There's just no way around that! Since my discharge from the Army a few weeks ago (for psychological reasons) I've been undergoing dianetic processing, and, while the results to date haven't been anything spectacular, the improvement in general mental tone and physical well-being, has been very definite though not of a marked degree.

As for drawing from "mysticism" and "folk-lore" and "personal opinion", I'll grant you the last, but not the first too. In all of my reading of all the texts of dianetics, I have yet to see one part of it that smacks of folk-lore or mysticism. Personal opinion there is, and lots of it, but not the other two.

To me it is the ultimate in materialism and mechanistic thinking, and there, possibly, is its main fault, as others see it. For me that's its one redeeming virtue, having had my fill of the ridiculousness of mysticism and allied methods of thinking. By that I don't mean to criticize religion, but to damn all the hypocritical money grabbing cults, crazes, and other jabberwocky that are used to separate the illiterate, the uninformed, and the fear-stricken from their hard earned money.

I have just gone through one of

the most trying experiences of my life. I have spent the last seven months at Walter Reed Army Hospital, undergoing one of the most intensive, futile, attempts to evaluate my character and behavior pattern. Some of it is undoubtedly correct, as far as it goes, but much of it is mere conjecture, mere supposition, a jumping at conclusions that are wholly unfounded in fact.

Knowing Dianetics, and knowing much of psychiatry, I went into Walter Reed with a load of terror and fear that would probably have swamped a far stabler personality—if they had known what I knew, of the barbarous, brutal, medievalistic methods used on those who are helpless to resist or who are ignorant of their effects. I felt then, and I still feel now that I was fighting for life itself, and that if I made one slip of the tongue or acted too "irrationally" I'd come under the knife or the electrode. I thank God I had my wits about me, and though I didn't escape without scars of the conflict, I did escape without having my mind and brain being scrambled more than it was already.

In all of my reading and studying of psychiatry and allied subjects, I had never found any hope or comfort, or hope of a "cure" or rational explanation of what ailed me. In Dianetics I think I have. Only time can clarify that hope now.

There are a few, a very few, psychiatrists who are honest, sincere people, with some understanding of the problem to be solved. I met a couple of them at Walter Reed, but, there are also those who have no understanding, and none of the knack of handling people that is the prime requisite of the position of psychiatrist. It was my misfortune to get one of the latter to handle my case, and make the evaluation with which

I am, at present, stuck. It is my hope that dianetics will erase it.

Without any doubt whatsoever on my part, I know for a fact, that dianetics has been a magnet for all kinds of screwballs you can name, but, the fact remains, there are those who are sincere in their efforts with dianetics, and who do not treat it as a form of mysticism mumbo-jumbo. It is helping some very disturbed people.

It has become a cult in Los Angeles, and most of the auditors in this area and other areas are busily trying to knock down the effects of such perversions as the Los Angeles group is guilty of.

To give you an idea of the parallelisms that existed prior to dianetics, I'm going to quote from Korzybski's "Science and Sanity" (3rd edition) page 492, to wit: "A patient whose unconscious semantic difficulty is made conscious either improves or is relieved entirely—All schools agree that the behavior difficulties are due to experiences hidden in the 'unconscious' and that bringing them to 'consciousness' is the main goal."

You can if you wish find many parallelisms in all works that have to do with the function of the mind. How Hubbard arrived at his conclusions, how he made his deductions, is after all very immaterial, and the whole test of his works, now and in the future, is: Does it work?

When you have answered that question you've answered all the questions that have been raised and will be raised. To lightly scan his works and then give forth an emphatic opinion on it, is the sheerest folly, and serves no useful purpose. To get in and dig and keep your mouth shut until you have something concrete to offer is the best course in the long run, and all the weighty opinions of the most erudite, will

mean nothing against just one fact, properly stated.

So now I'll sit back and wait for the inevitable reaction.

Clarance R. McFarland, Jr.  
3612 15th Ave. West  
Seattle 99, Wash.

*We do not intend to have IMAGINATION become a battle ground for the merits or fallacies of L. Ron Hubbard's dianetic theory. However, since we did run an article on the subject treating it in a concise and both pro and con manner, we feel obliged to run your letter and append a few editorial comments.*

*First of all it is quite obvious that you have had and do have a quite remarkable enmity for the field of psychiatry. And for all your insistence that dianetics does not incorporate "mysticism" and "folk-lore" you turn right around and describe psychiatry in terms of barbarism, and medievalistic brutal methods in the use of the knife and electrode.*

*It would seem to us that you accuse psychiatry of the very thing you preach dianetics lacks. Which to us is much the same as the pot calling the kettle black insofar as your definition is concerned.*

*While we hold no opinion on this controversial question of organized medical science against the still questionable therapeutic value of dianetics, we do have a certain sense of values in relation to both of them that might be put on the record in reply to your various experiences and conclusions.*

*First of all it is quite ridiculous to castigate medical science with fearful expressions of medievalistic torture. By and large the major function of psychiatry is to bring to the surface the "hidden problem" that an individual may be afflicted with in relation to his leading a normal life. This process of helping a patient*

does not involve electrical therapy or pre-frontal lobotomy except in severe cases where ordinary therapeutic measures are ineffective by the nature of the patient's degree of psychic trauma. And it must be remembered that these extreme measures are not practiced except under the very closest supervision and study of highly trained medical men.

Your experience at Walter Reed is not surprising, since you went into consultation with a psychiatrist firmly convinced that he could not help you, only harm you, and that if you were not on guard constantly you would be under a knife or electrode.

If you are at all broad-minded you will see that no medical man could help you a great deal under such circumstances. As in other illnesses, the patient's cooperation is a necessity. If you are fighting the doctor who is endeavoring to help you it is quite problematic if he could achieve anything but failure.

You make quite a point of parallelism.

Did you ever think of psychiatry in medical science in relation to a man who might have suffered a severe attack of appendicitis necessitating an immediate operation with the patient refusing to allow the doctor to make the proper incision to get at the cause of the trouble? Your attitude at Walter Reed might very well be a parallel to that hypothetical case. You knew you had some physic difficulty and yet you refused to allow the doctor to open up your subconscious—not with the knife you feared, but with the consultative diagnostic procedures he had been expertly trained in using. Under such circumstances it is incredible to believe that a true evaluation of your illness could be determined. In plain and simple language, because

of superstitious beliefs you had established in relation to medical science, you refused medical help.

This brings us to dianetics. Now first of all we do not mean to say or imply that dianetics does not have therapeutic values. We just do not know; it is much too early to ascertain whatever value it may have. And certainly it will be up to competent men of science to make this evaluation. We hear scattered reports that it has helped this person or that person, and a report such as yours where you feel it has helped—but not to any marked degree, tends to lead one to believe that any stated values are entirely premature. Even you do not know; you only hope.

As to the dianetic auditors, we have a distinct opinion on this phase of the subject. To be an auditor it would seem all you have to do is read Hubbard's book, perhaps re-read it and then hang up your shingle as a practicing auditor. There is of course a school in the East where Hubbard will train you to be an auditor in a few short weeks for a certain amount of money. This condition we look upon with a very skeptical, and alarmed eye.

Mental illness, by its very nature is perhaps the most difficult of all ailments to cure in that a medical man cannot put his finger on a physical aspect such as a tumor, a known virus, etc. Such being the case his medical training must be extensive and diligent in order to cope with the elusive illnesses of the mind.

As such it is quite incredible to believe that any person would entrust his mental well-being in the hands of a dianetic "auditor" who knows as much about medicine as your editor knows about life on the third planet of Sirius—if there is such a plan-

*et. You speak of cults and crazes and allied jabberwocky. Anyone who believes that by reading Hubbard's book on dianetics, qualifies him to go forth and cure the ills of mankind is a danger as well as a possible help.*

*How many auditors are "clears"? And just what is a "clear" in the first place? Have you ever seen one? If anything is jabberwocky such flat statements are. We contend that it is dangerous to allow unqualified persons to dabble in the intricacies of the human mind. To use your parallelism again, one would hardly expect a man to hire as an attorney a person who had read a text on law; such a reading would certainly not qualify a man to appear in a court and defend a client with any assurance of success—leave alone ability to understand and cope with the various complicated machinations of legal practice. Thus the "auditors" we hear about are not competently trained persons, they are people who have read a book or taken a highpressure course which in itself has not been proven efficacious.*

*As a theory dianetics may have much to offer. It may very well be that its averred therapeutic values are well-founded. Only time will tell—under the study of qualified medical experts since that is the field in which its basic theory is founded.*

*In the meantime it might be well for all to examine it with an open mind and an eye toward qualified science for proof. But let's not degrade science in the meantime or go off half-cocked to some self-appointed doctor of mental ills who tacks a title page of a book on his wall as a diploma. Just remember that science has been good to us in the past. Dianetics may be in the future. That, however, remains to be seen . . . with*

## HE WANTS SERIALS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Let me congratulate you on your wonderful April issue of IMAGINATION. This is the first I have read. Do you have any back copies? I sure would like to get hold of them.

IMAGINATION reminds me of the large magazines in the field. Most of the small size format magazines seem to be drifting to the more scientific field and less to fiction. I'm glad to see that one still has the same good material the larger mags tend to feature.

BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST is one of the best stories I have read in a long time. Geoff St. Reynard is one of my favorites.

DRINK MY RED BLOOD . . . was excellent also. It reminds me of another story by Matheson, "Born of Man and Woman".

IN THIS SIGN . . . didn't live up to Bradbury's usual standard.

THE HUNGRY HOUSE was good. The rest were not too special but were enjoyable reading.

I have a suggestion to make that will probably make you have ulcers. I would like to see a serial in IMAGINATION. Why not reprint some of the old classics?

And about Jack Gaughan's suggestion as to the illos being design instead of repeating an incident from the story, I disagree. The April issue was as it should be.

Tom Réamy  
Rt. 3, Box 727-R  
Austin, Texas

First of all, Tom, back issues of IMAGINATION are still available, but the supply is very limited. Because of this we offer them to subscribers first. So if you enter a subscription to Madge you can have any back issues you want included as part of

the subscription.

As to the serial idea, we don't think it's advisable as long as we're a bi-monthly. We think it's too much to have to wait two months for a new installment. However, we'll have some darn good news about that soon. We're not trying to be secretive by not making a flat statement now, but *IMAGINATION* will step up its publication frequency in the near future. That's good news, we'll bet. And along those lines we'd like to get some more reaction from other readers on the serial question. When Madge comes out sooner do you want us to use serials? And just one further word about your suggestion. No, we won't use any reprints—at any time. We don't believe in reprints, never have, and hope we never will. Reprint magazines, in our opinion, hurt not only authors, but the publishers as well. The editorial budget of a reprint magazine is practically nil, while with a magazine like *IMAGINATION* it takes a nice chunk of money to buy the stories you read. Very often the author realizes nothing from a reprinted story since some houses buy all rights. We don't. We buy only 1st N.A. Serial Rights. The author retains all other rights. Which means he's free to sell his story to an anthology, radio, tv, or even the movies. We don't mind competition, but we do not like to see magazines putting out reprints only to save editorial expense. And of course, every reprint story means just that much less of a market for the science-fiction writer. This is one of our few gripes; we've had it for years and we'll always have it. If we must have reprints in the field let's confine them to anthologies and hard cover novels. That way the author gets a break and the cut-throat element is eliminated at the

newsstand

. . . . . wth

#### A STF DICTIONARY

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The inquiry of a reader in the April issue as to whether a list of science - fiction terms is available, prompts me to let you know that I am at work on such a dictionary. I shall appreciate your letting your readers know, and telling them I shall be glad to have any words or phrases they may care to send me.

They should be new words, or existing words in new combinations, or existing words given new applications or meanings. They should send, for each word, the author, the title of the story, and the date of its publication.

I have a staff engaged in collecting science-fiction terms, but always in such projects considerable help comes from the suggestions of readers.

Joseph T. Shipley  
29 West 46th St.

New York 19, N. Y.

For the information of our readers, Mr. Shipley is the author of the "Dictionary of Word Origins". Collier's magazine in their September 9, 1950 issue featured an article concerning Mr. Shipley, referring to him as the "word detective". Further details can be found in "Who's Who In America". All of which we mention to emphasize the fact that this is a serious project, one which we applaud wholeheartedly and suggest to our readers that they forward any information they may have to Mr. Shipley. For our own part we suggest that Mr. Shipley pay special attention to the stories in *IMAGINATION*. Our authors are using new words quite frequently. For example the Mack Reynolds story in the April issue, *NOT IN THE RULES*,

*has a number of innovations that might be applicable . . . wlh*

### ABOVE THE MADD'ING CROWD

Dear Ed:

I should like to make a comment on your magazine. Editions of IMAGINATION on my neighborhood newsstand have attracted my lingering attention. The magazine is indeed an improvement on the poor maligned "pulps" which somehow seem to subsist for the most part in spite of low quality literature, poor type paper, and horrendous format. I am glad to see a magazine in the field which is willing to print stories embodying respectable vocabularies and subtle ideas as well as the forceful plots and tense action essential to this type.

Moreover, as an indifferent draftsman who still recalls his early aspirations to art, I feel that the quality of your covers and illustrations is not only exceptional, but also the argument that first draws a reader to IMAGINATION.

Samuel W. Eager, Jr.  
132 Chestnut St.  
Albany, N. Y.

*Thanks, Sam, and we'll do our best to keep every issue better than the preceding one . . . wlh*

### AN ABOMINATION YET!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Even a tag of red pencil comment on a rejection slip is a help. I thank you for the one anent my last submission. I'm trying another one that is probably not too gruesome—since you published that abomination DRINK MY RED BLOOD . . .

I have read "Dracula" seven or eight times and could read it again; it is a book, with enough in it to show the dangers and horrors of

vampirism. But I do think this story in the April IMAGINATION is just a bit on the raw side. Dealing with a child, and dealing with something an imaginative child of morbid nature could think to try, it is unlike a story such as Ted Sturgeon's SHADOW, SHADOW, ON THE WALL in the February issue, which was a superb tale. I am quite interested in seeing what reaction you get to publishing a story like that. I will say the story is splendidly written, but it seems more like the precis of a forthcoming novel. The author might make a book out of his idea—if he has the kid get a stake driven through his foul heart in the end!

But the other stories were excellent, and the cover design is exquisite. The nicest concept I have seen on a fantasy magazine. The tale, BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST is a masterpiece of allegory, by jove, as well as being an intriguing tale.

Miles McAlpin  
P. O. Box 122  
Tillamook, Ore.

*If you'll look through the reader department this issue you'll see a few reactions to the Matheson story, Miles. And as we said, the reaction is mainly rare notices or extreme distaste. All of which goes to show the wide preference in stories . . wlh*

### AN AUTHOR PROTESTS

Dear Bill:

While reading the June issue of IMAGINATION I ran across the reference to Spanish-language fantasy magazines in FANDORA'S BOX. To quote: "Even if you never see these magazines and never want to, it's interesting to know that your favorite authors and stories are being enjoyed by fans who can't read English."

To which, I'm afraid, it's necessary to add: For which privilege none of the authors represented are receiving one red cent. Evidently Miss Wolf is not aware of the fact that some of these Spanish magazines print by out and out piracy. The stories which go into them are selected, it seems, by an American, an extremely well known fan who apparently is proud of his participation in this kind of literary thievery.

There seems to be little that the pirated authors can do about this condition at the moment; however, you, as editor of an American science-fiction magazine which will probably be pirated by *Los Cuentos Fantasticos* sooner or later should at least refrain from printing what amounts to tacit approval of the practice.

Incidentally, none of my own stories have ever proven popular enough to our friends South-of-the-border to be pirated in this fashion, so I have no personal axe to grind.

James Blish  
171 Pelton Ave.  
Staten Island 10, N. Y.

*The literary piracy practices of the Mexican magazine you mention are no secret to your editor, Jim. While I edited FANTASTIC ADVENTURES at Ziff-Davis we found that not only were some of our stories stolen by this questionable Mexican outfit, but they also used our covers, blocking out the logo. The matter was taken up with the attorneys of AS & FA, but it seemed as if there was no legal hold we could get on this magazine. As to our personal feelings on the matter you can imagine how angry we were—and are that a cheap fly-by-night Mexican firm would do such a dastardly thing under some technicality of a copyright being invalid insofar as they are concerned. And we'll go on rec-*

*ord right now and say that in all likelihood we won't be able to stop them from pirating stories, illustrations and covers from IMAGINATION if they choose to do so, but if we ever meet anybody connected with the project we'll have a few choice things to say.*

*As to the mention in FANDORA'S BOX, we don't censor fan news. We try and be as fair as possible—even to a nauseating magazine like the one mentioned. Anything in science-fiction is fan news and the fans have the right to know and express their views in any manner in the proper departments of this book. And along these lines we'd like to mention one other thing. Mari Wolf's husband is Rog Phillips. And I believe Rog has had some of his work pirated by this same publication you mention. Which shows that Mari is reporting the news fairly, even though she may have\* an axe to grind personally.*

*As to an American having a hand in this literary piracy, we don't know anything about that . . . wlh*

#### A FIRST LETTER

Dear Ed:

I'm enclosing a check for my subscription to IMAGINATION.

I enjoy your magazine immensely. I have been reading science-fantasy about 15 years now, and Madge has an excellent variety of different types of science & fantasy.

I have never written to an editor before to give my opinion of a magazine—but yours merits it. Thanks for a wonderful magazine.

R. S. B.  
5303 Suwanee Ave.  
Tampa 3, Fla.

*Thanks for the nice words, RSB, but say, why only the initials? . . . wlh;*

#### WANTS TO BUY AND SELL

Dear Ed:

I'd like to obtain back issues of Astounding Science-Fiction for my files. And I have for sale copies of Other Worlds, Amazing Stories, Worlds Beyond, and odd issues of some others. Thanks a lot.

Jerry Hunter

4612 E. New York St.

Indianapolis 1, Ind.

*We note you're not offering copies of Madge for sale, Jerry! That's good, because you'll want to have an up to date file of the best magazine! (That's us!) . . . . . wlh*

#### A NEW FAN

Dear Ed:

I am very new to science-fiction and would like a little information concerning the following points:

1. I wish to start a collection of stf books and magazines. Would appreciate some tips.

2. Would like to know the names and info on some good fanzines. Thanks to FANDORA'S BOX I'm finding out something about this.

3. Would also like information concerning any fan club in Kansas if such exists.

And last but not least, does anybody have any books by Lovecraft for sale? Thanks, ed.

Riley Joe Snyder  
419 S. Blockley  
Wichita, Kansas

*We're going to leave the fans answer your questions, Riley. We're sure you'll get quite a few letters in response to your questions. In the meantime, welcome into the fold!*

. . . . . wlh

#### HIS ALL-TIME FAVORITE STORY

Dear Bill:

Here I am reading the June issue of IMAGINATION and I haven't

even finished the letter to you I had started on the April issue. But here goes:

I think that DRINK MY RED BLOOD . . . is the best story I've ever read. You can tell Richard Matheson so too and to keep writing stories like the same.

Next best I liked THE HUNGRY HOUSE and BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST. The only yarn I didn't care for was NOT IN THE RULES. Too many details.

I've only read one story in the June issue so far, FOLLOW THE WEEDS. And though I haven't the slightest idea what weeds have to do with # I thoroughly enjoyed the story.

In conclusion I'd like to ask you to get more vampire, ghost, and off-trail horror stories. They are the kind I like best!

Gail Rodgers

2416 W. 9th St.

Los Angeles 6, Cal.

*We're happy to know you liked the Matheson story so well, Gail. You know, that yarn was an experiment. And the reaction has been just about as we figured—either fans thought it was really a top-notch story, or they didn't like it at all. Few middle of the road opinions. We ran it to see what the reaction would be. One thing we've found out: you either like it and its type or you don't—but one thing, you won't forget it. We'll see about others like this as time goes on.*

*As to the title of Margaret St. Clair's story, it was symbolic; not meant to refer directly to an incident or scene as a great many titles do . . . . . wlh*

#### NEXT STOP JAPAN

Dear Ed:

I just bought my June issue of

**IMAGINATION:** First, I would like to comment on the swell front cover. Nice going, Hannes Bok!

As yet I can't report on any of the stories as I have not had time to read them. I've been too interested in the changes you've made and the swell cover!

For the record, science-fiction and fantasy have been my one and only love in reading material since I was about 15 years old, and that's been an equal number of years ago!

Oh yes, I always send my copy of **IMAGINATION** to my husband in Japan just as soon as I've finished reading it. He tells me he passes it along to other fellows and they all enjoy the magazine very much.

Marcine Applegate  
Rt. 2, Box 83

Central Point, Ore.

*We're glad you like the new format of **IMAGINATION**, Marcine. And we also think it's an excellent idea to send copies of the magazine to the boys in the Service overseas. How about the rest of you readers doing the same thing! It's not only a patriotic service helping give the boys a little reading pleasure, but new fans will be found too that way. What say, gang! . . . wlh*

#### A BIG KICK—OF PLEASURE!

Dear Bill:

Just got the June Madge. Wotta kick! I got my letter published! Bloch's story was one of the best I've ever read. Myers' new character is a real nifty. Say, how about any Burroughs fans contacting me? And anyone got a copy of "Bride of Frankenstein" for sale?

Eldon K. Everett  
P. O. Box 513  
Tacoma, Wash.

*You made it again, Eldon . . . wlh*

#### THE BEST IN THE FIELD . . . ?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The April issue of Madge was swell. But let's not kid ourselves, "Astounding" and "Galaxy" are the best in the field. But I will say your magazine along with "Other Worlds" and "The Magazine of Fantasy & Science-Fiction" does place above all but the first two mentioned. This is based on good experience too as I have every issue of all of these magazines.

I am now going to take your magazine apart and tell you what I think of it:

1. Format. Although I like slick paper for a few mags I do think it would be a pity if they all were alike.

2. Covers. This is amazing. Looking them over I can't find a single bad one . . .

3. Advertising. Kept to a good minimum.

4. Contents Page. Perfect.

5. Editorials. Darn good.

6. Artwork. Please let's not have any more silly humor scenes.

7. Stories. I don't like too much humor. TOFFEE is all right, but that's enough.

Really, Bill, you have a fine magazine. If you can get a few more 1st rate authors you have a salesman in me. Now, if you're a good editor you'll forget all the nice things I said and get to work!

Charles Moslander  
284 Lemp Ave.  
St. Louis 18, Mo.

*That's us burning the midnight oil, Chuck. Just watch coming issues, and maybe you'll revise your opinion about the top magazine. As to 1st rate authors, we think we have them. And watch for a new TOFFEE novel shortly . . . . . wlh*

# 'NOTHING BUT THE BEST'

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